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IN LOW RELIEF.



# IN LOW RELIEF

*A BOHEMIAN TRANSCRIPT*

BY

MORLEY ROBERTS

AUTHOR OF "THE WESTERN AVERNUS"

In Two Volumes

VOL. II.

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# IN LOW RELIEF.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A PHOTOGRAPH AND A SKETCH.

FOR the rest of the week in which he had seen Priscilla and proposed to her, Torrington, with a buoyant self-confidence, was far happier than he had been. Melancholy did not wholly claim him for her own at night, and though his new story was of a morbid cast he stood outside of it, and never attempted to put his own personality into a single one of the characters. He even chattered about it in the frankest way, and gloated in rather an absurd but amusing

manner over the ghastliness of some of the details of this hopeful book. Then he took more exercise, and made so many more acquaintances in the neighbouring studios, of which William was also the attendant, that that individual began to be puzzled in his mind as to who might be Torrington's great friend after all. John himself got a little irritated at being found in four successive places one after the other, especially as William, who was a perfect innocent in hiding his emotions, exhibited unmistakable surprise each time he unearthed the studio lounge. He even began to look on it as a kind of game, and used to try to guess beforehand where this Mr. Torrington would be next. But at this hide-and-seek the visitor was so often the victor, by reason of his very want of motive, that he made William quite unhappy.

For instance, Torrington lounged into Gaskell's, and after shaking hands and borrowing enough tobacco from a pile lying

loose on the dirty table to roll a cigarette, he walked round.

"Got anything to see? Oh, yes! Hum, not bad. Hum, this is bad."

"It is fierce," said Gaskell, who applied the word indiscriminately when he awarded blame to his own work or that of others.

"Glad you think so. It isn't everybody can see his own faults."

"No," replied Arthur satirically.

"You be hanged, Gaskell. That's not true of me. I can see most of mine."

"And do?"

"Yes, and do."

"What a discouraging prospect for you."

And they both laughed. Then the key rattled in the door, and William entered with a bottle of beer.

"Good morning, sir." This to Torrington.  
"That will be seven pence, sir." That to Gaskell. And he withdrew.

Presently William found himself let into Raeburn's studio by Torrington, and starting

with surprise, nearly let a tinned tongue fall. Torrington stared at him and turned round again, resuming an interrupted conversation with George.

“Yes, I’m always in some scrape. I live in hot water. Hang it, but I’m going to end it, old man. How would marriage suit me? On my word I have a domestic turn. You may laugh, but you’ll see it come off soon. However I’ll come round to-night to see you as I’m a bachelor still.”

“Very well,” said Raeburn, and then William let Torrington and himself out, saying at the same time, “Good-day, sir, and that’ll be ten pence, sir.”

A quarter of an hour afterwards, just at one o’clock, William was round the corner at Monk’s, a pleasant, cheery, and prosperous painter, whom Torrington had but lately got to know, and on entering to clear away the lunch, which had been consumed early on account of the imminent prospect of a rich man coming to sit for his portrait, he

saw some one in a great high-backed chair, usually occupied by mayors or such people when Monk painted them. He thought it was a sitter, but on turning round it was only Torrington again, and he let a plate fall in his vexation. Why, the man was ubiquitous. William began to be possessed with the fear of meeting him, and swore a little to himself softly as he picked up the fragments of the plate. But his ruling passion for accounts was too strong in him to be disturbed, and before he withdrew in confusion he muttered to Monk, "That will be a shilling and nine pence, sir."

"Yes," replied the painter, "but how much do you charge me for the plate?"

And William fled without replying, while Torrington and the painter broke into a shout of laughter.

"He's a queer fellow," said Monk. "I believe you scared him. Is he frightened of you?"

"No," laughed the other, who began to

have a suspicion of the evil effect he had on the man, "but I think I disturb him. This is the fourth studio he's seen me in this day."

"Ah, have a whisky and soda and a cigarette."

It was Monk's invariable offer to every one who entered his place, and, as his whisky was very drinkable, he managed to get through a good deal of it in the course of a month.

While Torrington was smoking and drinking, with his legs over the arm of the chair, the other went on with his work, for to save the time his expected sitter was wasting he took up a replica of a small portrait and painted industriously.

"Hang these rich men," he grumbled; "they are so busy and so important that they never think of our time."

"Who is it?" asked Torrington.

"I don't know whether you know him. He's a dustman or a contractor or something

of the kind. I believe he's building or helping to build that great block near Oxford Street, and I've got to paint his money-grubbing phiz."

Torrington looked at the portrait which was opposite to him.

"He looks like it. I know the place you mean and the man too, I think. It's a good likeness. I believe I saw him coming out of the block the other day."

"Likely enough. He always is there and up at the top, too. He sacks everybody all round about once a month to keep them going."

"Ah!" said Torrington, who was feeling for a coin in his pocket, and feeling in vain; "he stays up at the top and looks down on all the banks where he keeps his money, and when he comes down he looks up and thinks how much more he'll have there soon. Hang him! I wonder what such a man thinks of us. I suppose we're all a useless lot of idlers without any business to be alive.

I'll bet that's his view. I never can quite get to the bottom of the bourgeois mind with regard to artists of any sort, painters or writers. Perhaps it's because it's a bottomless pit. A man who doesn't work ten hours a day is a loafer unless he has money. But they ask us out, too. What for? I told Wynne the other day that even yet among the mass of 'em we are little better than performing monkeys or dogs with tricks. Confound it, but we don't always perform. You know I never go out myself, or very rarely. Yet only a month ago I went to a house that I couldn't get out of going to. I know I was asked to talk; I was expected to talk; the idiots all tried to make me talk; and I wouldn't. But when I went, my host looked as if I'd defrauded him out of my dinner. I shan't be asked there again, and I don't want to go. For the dinner was very, very bad."

Monk smiled.

"Perhaps if it had been good you might have done what was expected of you."



“Perhaps,” grumbled Torrington, who had rather too great an idea of his own conversational powers, which, however, were certainly rather above the average. “But after all what’s the use of going out?”

“A good deal,” said Monk, who knew nearly every one in London, and was as popular as brains, good looks, and success could make him. “It’s fun ; it livens one up. And then there are the girls, you know.”

“Bother the girls !” cried Torrington ; “there are sweet enough girls outside of society. And I don’t want to marry a woman with money just for the sake of it. I think when I marry I shall marry a girl without any. For——”

And then there came a knock at the door, though rather a feeble one, which made him break off.

“Is that your infernal dustman ?” said he.

“Pshaw !” cried Monk ; “do you think a

man with a hundred thousand would knock at a door in that way? Sit down."

He went to the door, and presently Torrington heard his voice.

"Come in, come in; why there's a friend of yours in here. You know Mr. Torrington, don't you?"

As he spoke he drew aside the *portière*, and Torrington, turning round sharply, saw Priscilla standing there. He jumped up, and all thoughts of golden dustmen, of bourgeois and society girls, fled from him.

"Know me! I should think she does. Come in, Saint Priscilla!" he cried, as he went towards her and held out his hand.

"Yes," echoed Monk, "come, in Saint Priscilla. I wonder none of us named you that before. We must have been dull dogs, very dull dogs indeed, not to have thought of it. We owe you one, Torrington, for an artistic suggestion."

She came in very modestly and a little

timidly, for Torrington looked so dangerously glad to see her.

"Oh, I am so tired!" she exclaimed, as she sat down.

"Yes," cried Monk instantly, "then have a whisky and soda."

"You be hanged, Monk," said Torrington, "Miss Morris doesn't drink your prescription. Offer it to me and a dustman, but don't give it to a saint, you—you—old duffer."

The conversation ran on nothing in general for a while until Monk retired into the background round a screen to produce water for making the tea, which is so common a feature in studio life. Torrington watched his disappearance with eager eyes, and when he was without doubt beyond the possibility of seeing, he took Priscilla's hand and kissed it very tenderly.

"How hard it seems, dear," he said, "that I should be with you and yet be unable to express myself; and, confound it,

old Monk, dear fellow that he is, talks as if he had as much right to you as I have. Hang him ! ”

He leant over her and would even have dared to attempt to kiss her, when she said “ hush ” very softly as Monk’s kettle rattled, and the owner of the studio with its unlimited soda and whisky came from behind the screen, which hid, or pretended to hide, the more domestic part of the place. It was amusing to note Torrington’s changes of visage and conversation and the differences of matter and tone when Monk was in view and when he was not ; it would have made an unseen onlooker chuckle to see how he caught her hand and then dropped it as though he had been nearly detected in some act of theft, or absolutely roar with laughter to hear him twist a sentence from a loving commencement into the most ordinary continuation and end.

“ Dearest, I have been longing to see ”—

then Monk bustled into view—"how West's relief of you is getting on. But"--and away went Monk again for cups—"I must have a talk with you. May I come round to-night? Are you at home? I want your photograph to show my"—and back came Monk with sugar—"opinion of it, which is, that he has spoilt it—to show my mother and sister. May I come round? Yes? At seven? All right."

Then he had to leave this disjointed conversation and make one of three, though he was intensely irritated with Monk for daring to call her Mary, or sometimes even Priscilla. Poor Monk was rather in a wonderment as to why Torrington every now and again looked so grim, and thought of offering him another whisky and soda as a consolation for some possible injury Fate had inflicted on him during the course of the day. But such a gift would have been superfluous before the night, sober as Torrington usually was.

At seven o'clock punctually he was down in Camden Town and called at Priscilla's lodgings. The landlady opened the door to him, and, opposing a bulk to his entrance which filled the passage, barred his way not only physically but with the assertion that Miss Morris was not at home.

"Nonsense," was his decided reply. "I know she is in. Please call her."

Then Priscilla came down, and he went upstairs with her.

"Who's he?" asked the fat landlady of her daughter, who was her physical opposite in every possible way.

"He's an artist, I think. Anyhow he looks like it."

"Hum!" grumbled the old woman. "Didn't he come here in a hansom cab? A nice respectable thing for gents to come here in hansom cabs! I ain't agoing to have it. Now if it was a four-wheeler. But no hansoms comes to my 'ouse."

And this she told Priscilla in the morning,

much to the girl's indignation, though she was amused by the absurdity of thinking a two-wheeled cab essentially immoral and a four-wheeled one immaculate and beyond reproach.

When Torrington reached the girl's sitting-room, he seized on a photograph of her which occupied the table between the windows. It represented her much as she looked when he first noticed her drooping head in Armour's studio, and as he thought of her when he fancied she might be thinking of him in quiet.

"This is the one I want, dear," said he, but she took it out of his hand and put it behind her back.

"What do you want it for, Mr. Torrington?"

"You know, dear girl. It is to show my mother and sister. I know they will love you too, though not a thousandth part as well as I do; and I should like them to see my sweet saint's face."

She shook her head.

“Then don’t give it me, Priscilla, but come over yourself; come and lunch with them, and I will introduce you.”

“Yes, but Mr. Torrington,” she hesitated, “but you will introduce me as the girl who—who is going to be your wife, and I haven’t given my answer yet.”

She did not look at him as she spoke, and he went towards her swiftly, taking her in his arms.

“Then give it to me now, dear. Why should you wait? You know I love you, and you will love me soon, even if you don’t now. Say yes, Priscilla, say yes.”

His voice was musical and persuasive, and his words, though simple, came with the force of conviction and the energy of passion. Ah! had she been wholly free to choose him, she would have answered nothing and answered him all, yielding him in silence her lips which consented, and her



soul glad to be at rest in the loftier shadow of his own.

“No, there is no need to wait, darling. There is no need——”

“Ah! but indeed there is, there is, Mr. Torrington. I cannot say yes now. But——”

“But what, Priscilla?” he said gravely, releasing her as he spoke, since he recognised her words were no subterfuge and her reluctance no sham.

“But you may show them the photograph, if you will promise not to say it is settled.”

“Very well, dear, I promise. You shall put it in paper for me. And I will go away.”

“No,” she said, her face clearing with his relaxed insistence, “you must stay now and have tea with me. Alice will be in directly, and we can eat together. If you like to smoke you may. I like it.”

She bustled off to get the tea-things, and

Torrington sat by the side of the fire in a very cheerful mood. He was not cast down by her refusal to say yes. It was very natural, and she was to be valued somewhat in proportion to the hardness of the struggle to win her. Yet in his heart he believed she either loved him or was on the verge of it, and that in a few days she would yield her heart at last. No fear, no real doubt assailed him; he was happy to see her, blessed to be with her, and hopeful of all these things which he so ardently desired. At any rate he believed she loved no other, and his creed was that true passion could work its way with any woman worth winning, aye, even if such a victory were not blessed, but one which would bring shame and sorrow behind the car of its dreadful triumph. But now nothing but Passion and Purity was recognisable in his own hot heart, from which her image had cast out every evil desire, every dark phantom of the past, and every threatening fear of the future,

which at last brightened before him in the clearer path that but a little while ago had been choked with thorns and shadowed by the clouds of despair.

“You are very silent, Mr. Torrington,” said Priscilla at last, and he looked up smiling.

“I am thinking of you, dear, at any rate,” he replied, and she was pleased to know by word of mouth what she had recognised by intuition.

After Priscilla had made a couple of pieces of toast, Alice came in and shook hands shyly with this gentleman who wanted to marry her sister. She looked at him curiously when Torrington’s eyes were turned away, and settled in her own mind that Priscilla, or rather Mary, was very lucky, and would be a fool if she didn’t take him. For her own part she thought him good-looking, and if his sharp eyes were rather confusing with their piercing and steady glance, she was of opinion that they

were nice to look at. She herself hardly hoped to have such a lover, for she was not as good-looking as Mary. She knew that, although she was unable to see what the artists raved about in her sister, who after all wasn't so very beautiful. Yet if Mr. Torrington thought so, that was all right, for he was a gentleman, and was of course rich compared with them. He might help them in many ways, and would doubtless do so. She was quite on Torrington's side, and was his ardent ally before tea was over.

It was ten o'clock before John got away with his precious photograph, which he carried very carefully, since it was on china, and might easily be broken. He took it up to the studios, for Raeburn had expected him there about nine, and as he put it down, with his hat and coat, he chuckled to think what a surprise the contents of that innocent brown paper parcel would be to his friends. For, besides Raeburn, there

was Wynne with another man whom he knew well—Tenterden, the lithographic artist, a curious, sharp-looking fellow, of a somewhat sombre countenance.

Torrington was rather uproarious at the very first. He shook hands with the utmost joviality, for he was in the highest spirits. For one thing there is even a certain pleasure in an innocent deception, and he was in a way deceiving all these friends of his; for another, he was in love, and had just been with the girl whom he believed to love him.

“I think you’ve been drinking,” said Tenterden, who was quick to observe his excitement.

“No, I haven’t,” almost shouted John, “but I’m ready to. Raeburn, out with the whisky. You know that’s why I’ve come. Let us drink and get drunk. Hang it, but I’m merry to-night and will be merrier. *Vive le Bohème!*”

So Raeburn brought forth the glasses, the bottle of whisky, and the water.

“Confound it, Torrington,” said Wynne, “but take a little water.”

This was because John was mixing it half-and-half, in the most reckless way considering that he had eaten nothing but a little toast since one o'clock.

“I've taken a little,” he replied, with such emphasis that they all laughed.

“Where have you been to-night?” asked Raeburn, when every one was settled.

“Don't you wish you may know? I'll tell you one of these fine days. When I'm rich and respectable and married and very successful.”

Tenterden, who knew a little of Torrington's latest work, asked him about it, and that started the author at once. He proceeded to give a sketch of the ghastly morbidity which he was then writing in a dramatic way, with many gestures, appropriate and otherwise, moistening his throat all the while with the whisky in the most reckless manner. Presently he stopped and

looked at his glass, which was empty. He filled it half up with spirit and went on talking. The water was in a bottle too, but instead of taking that he kept on pouring in the whisky.

"Do you see what you are doing?" asked Wynne, who was chuckling to see Torrington in a fair way to become intoxicated.

"Ah! yes," replied the talker. But he did not return the whisky, he only filled the glass up with water. In about half a minute he was drunk. The others at first thought he was fooling.

"Yes," said he, "you'll see soon. I tell you there isn't a man anywhere who can do such work as I can. I'm a morbid case, no doubt, a pathological curiosity, but no one can do what I can."

"And no one wants to. No one will read your stuff," said Tenterden. "You are always doing things which read like nightmares."

“You ought to like it,” retorted Torrington. “This is a morbid age. I hope it will get more morbid, and then I shall have a chance. I tell you I can do it—hic—yes, I can. Suicide is my strong line. I once wrote a book about a man who had suicidal mania. I believe,” he added unctuously and not without a little humour, “that it would make you ill to read it.”

None of the others being quite of his taste they laughed. He joined in.

“But all the same,” he insisted, “it’s good. I read the last three chapters to a man I know, and——”

“He was ill?” asked Wynne.

“No, but he couldn’t do any of his own work for days after,” replied Torrington triumphantly. “It was just as it was with me when I read Zola’s *L’Assommoir*. The book is a horrible book, it reeks, it is foul. I tried to get through it a dozen times and couldn’t, but when I got into the swing of it, I couldn’t leave



off. And it haunts me yet. I can smell it now."

"Yes, but," the others began at once, "do you want to go and do likewise?"

"Yes I do in a way," shouted Torrington, jumping up. "I don't want the thing to smell exactly, but I want to do what I can do best. And I'm a morbid analyst by nature, a dissector, a vivisectionist, and I hate the Young Person most devoutly. But these poor ignorant beasts don't know who the Young Person is."

And he launched into a consecutive diatribe against the novelist's bugbear, which was wonderful considering he was undoubtedly drunk. Presently he stopped and looked at his audience.

"Do you know, boys, that I'm drunk?" he said solemnly. "It's the first time for seven years."

"Yes, we know it," replied the audience in a chorus. "We have been aware of the fact for some time."

“You be hanged!” cried Torrington; “but tell me, have I been talking sense? I forget what I said, but it was sense, wasn’t it?”

“It sounded like it,” said Wynne, who was bursting with laughter. Torrington nodded with gratification.

“Ah, that’s all right, then. And now, *apropos* of nothing, I’ve been writing a snake story.”

“What, like Elsie Venner?”

“No, Raeburn, not like Elsie Venner. For one thing, I humbly admit it isn’t so good.”

“Marvellous admission,” grunted Tenterden, and then Torrington fixed him with his eye.

“What’s that you say?”

“I said I didn’t believe it, old boy. I believe, in fact we all believe, you’re a great man.”

“Hum,” said John doubtfully, and half falling asleep he sat down in his chair with

a thump which shook the studio and made the flames of the gas waver. The shock woke him up, and he insisted on having more whisky.

He, himself, never remembered what he talked about after that, and when he asked the others, they said vaguely everything — politics, religion, morality, insanity, art in all its branches, travel and adventure, literature again. He lamented the want of a real literary magazine; he shook his fist at all the artists because there was only one great one. He mentioned G. F. Watts with maudlin reverence. He bullied all novelists but George Meredith, and doubtfully admitted that two others were not so bad. But every other sentence he stopped to take one of his friends by the arm and shake him violently, demanding at the same time, “Am I not talking sense?” And he did for the most part, though once or twice he lost the thread of his discourse and sought for it painfully, asking for silence meanwhile with

gestures which convulsed the others, who were nowhere with him at talking, even when he was sober.

At the last Torrington grew jocosely violent. As an illustration of a row he had once been in he pulled Wynne's nose, which was a prominent and very handsome organ; and to show how he had once come to grief wrestling, he nearly put Raeburn through his own screen. As for Tenterden's arm, it was black and blue next day. Yet the scene was so funny that he remained to listen and lost his train. When he got home he woke up his wife to say :

“ Such a joke, my dear.”

“ What ? ” Mrs. Tenterden demanded sleepily, and not without a little irritation.

“ Why, Torrington got drunk.”

“ Oh ! ” said the lady, and then Tenterden roared till he woke the child, and was more than suspected of being intoxicated himself.

That night was the most hilarious Tor-

rington had known for many days, and was to know for many many more. It was certainly a curious irony of Fate that this scene should precede the troubles which were coming on him. It was as if all the joy he had known for months was but a kind of intoxication, and that the days to come were to be like the morning after a revel. That night summed and typified the time of his untroubled courtship. He was happiest then when he was most excited, and he was most hopeful, for this somewhat disgraceful intoxication was in reality quite as much due to exhilaration of the mind as to his sudden and quite unexpected lapse into intemperance. For he was not "skilful in inebriety," as the great doctor put it, and had no wish to be.

## CHAPTER II.

### FEAR AND JEALOUSY.

THE next day after Torrington's unwonted exhibition of himself, every one round the studios knew it, and chaffed him unmercifully. The matter of his harangues was cast up at him, and he was asked when he would oust Shakespeare from his ancient throne and seat himself there, as the Sultan did with the pre-Adamite kings in *Vathek*. His memory of the scene was fairly good; he well remembered what he had said, and could have repeated most of it, but, taking what poor advantage he could of the situation, he laughingly denied having given forth what was attributed to him, accusing the others in turn of manufacturing it. But though he talked on the matter with ap-

parent unconcern, he was greatly troubled lest Priscilla should hear of it, and, without knowing what large share she herself had in this matter, think ill of him on that account.

As a matter of fact this was but an urgent example of his troubles about old scores. Although he did not know that Armour had ever spoken about him unfavourably to the girl, he was quite aware that many things might be alleged against him, many words of evil, many conversations of highly immoral tendency, and even some facts, such as this last accident. It was no more, for when Torrington said he had not been intoxicated for seven years he spoke fairly within the limits of the truth, although a strict teetotaler might have considered that occasional times of exhilaration deserved a worse name.

Every ardent and true lover of a pure girl goes through similar experiences, unless, indeed, his life has been entirely without blemish; but a mind like Torrington's, with

its powers of morbid imagination, suffers more than most, and, starting from premises which forebode sorrow, he proceeded very logically to make himself utterly unhappy. Yes, she would hear of it, and would be angry; she would dismiss him and his pleadings as those of a drunkard. He would insist, she would grow scornful; he would entreat, she would deny; and finally he beheld himself about to commit suicide in his own room, after having written a letter which would make her wretched for life. That comforted him somewhat, and he relented, rewrote the imaginary letter, and forgave her. But once a year she would come with flowers to lay on his tomb. That was a satisfactory ending—a great deal too satisfactory. So he grew miserable again, and working *à priori* once more, he sketched another *dénouement*.

Yes, he was dismissed, and instantly converting all his belongings into cash, he saw himself vanishing wretchedly clad into a



wilderness. Where the wilderness was he considered a detail, but it contained wild beasts of every description, like the fabulous island of the Swiss family Robinson. There he lived clad in skins; there he hunted, trapped, and fished, and was duly unhappy. He shed tears every day; he lifted up his hands to the cold, heartless sky; he laid down in loneliness to dream visions of her married to a rich artist who lived in Fitz-John's Avenue, and she had forgotten him. No, she hadn't, she named one of her children John. However, she was happy, that was a comfort. And he wasn't. That was a comfort too. He would have scorned himself if he had ever enjoyed a meal again or smoked a pipe—he wondered whether he should make it a desert where tobacco grew—without seeing her in the wreaths of smoke, appearing and vanishing again and again, to leave him after a little joy in a deeper gloom than ever. Finally, his desert came to be known, and the progress of the

country enabled him to imitate the Pathfinder and send Priscilla, who was nearly sixty by this, a mixed consignment of furs and hides, including such ill-assorted pelts as white bear and lion, beaver and ostrich, musquash and tiger. And of course she wept over them and told the story to her eldest daughter with tears in her eyes. Finally he died, and his bones were never buried; or if they were, they only found a resting place inside a wild beast. For he was never to be at peace.

This seemed very satisfactory to Torrington as he sat in his room and gloomed over the fire. He almost rubbed his hands in anticipation of his end, which would be very artistic and complete. He lighted his pipe and would have smoked on in comfort if it had not suddenly occurred to him that there was a much more miserable ending than that. He laid the pipe down.

Of course. Though Priscilla had dismissed him for bibulous indiscretion, she

had not really meant it. She loved him all the time, and his departure had been too hurried to give her a chance of showing her real feelings, which set towards him passionately like a great flood tide. So she too spent her life in hopeless misery, and of course died with his name on her lips while he was in that desert. He did not perhaps believe much in what is commonly called the supernatural; but from an artistic point of view he was uncommonly inclined to make himself wake hearing his name just at the moment she died. Yes, he thought he would end the story there. Just a very few more words would show that he withered away like a leaf after this, and, being unable to hunt, he died like a modern Philoctetes, who never had his weapons given back to him. The only thing which troubled him was that there was no villain in his story. He was half inclined to make Armour play the part, but relented because he would have to alter

his character too much. Wynne would make a good one, if instead of his quick and merry glance he gave him one full of deadly meaning, such as Mr. Willard's when he plays the heavy lead in a melodrama. However, in the end, he let the matter go, since there was no absolute need of having any more villainy in this story than his own. He could make himself a little worse than he was and a little better, and thus could get an internal struggle which would require a great amount of analysis such as he delighted in. So he smoked his pipe and went to bed.

There is, has been, and probably will continue to be, a great deal of nonsense talked about the artistic temperament both by those who possess it and those who do not. Unfortunately, the greatest harm is done by those who really have it in some degree ; it is made an excuse for dreaming, a defence of idleness, and a license for immorality ; but nevertheless the thing does exist, and is not

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a mere sham, as those with no more imagination than suffices to write a moral leader in a daily paper or a criticism in a review sometimes authoritatively tell the world. But its touchstone from a literary point of view is not imagination simple, it is the double imagination which enables a man to take part in a scene and look upon it as possible material. There is in such an one a divided consciousness, which in others would argue insincerity, that allows him in a state of great emotion to see himself from an artistic point of view. It is no exaggeration to say that a man with a strong imagination who has the faculty of story-telling may pass through any scene, however impassioned, and see it in such a light even at the time, unless the interest be so great or of such danger as to convert the attention from the voluntary to an involuntary state. It was this faculty, though he probably had it only in a limited degree, which enabled Torrington to look at himself

as he did. And sometimes he even saw himself in the very time of action or in the very act of speech.

It is a curious faculty, this, and one hardly recognised by the great majority even of highly intelligent people, who will hardly believe it possible so to divorce their minds from their bodies as to see themselves even in a long past time in the same way that they see others. But the power is to be cultivated, and to those who write what is not purely observation it is highly necessary. And observation is as nothing in some kinds of writing when compared with actual experience. Torrington, even when he had slain himself to his own artistic satisfaction, was partly aware of this, and rejoiced in what power he had even though it made him extremely uncomfortable and a self-tormentor.

On Wednesday afternoon (it was on Monday that he had erred in his estimate of his resistance to almost undiluted spirits)

he went round to Gaskell's, after setting his place in order to receive Priscilla, who was to come to him that night. He found Arthur in a savage mood, and was received gloomily. Probably some illustration for a book or magazine was considered too little finished, and had been returned for the process known in studio slang as "tickling up," that is to say for the insertion of a lot of detail which the artist considers unnecessary. For that always made Gaskell, whose work was usually "slight," madly indignant, and contemptuous of the British public.

"What's the row?" asked Torrington cheerfully.

"Nothing," growled Gaskell sulkily.

"Nothing, nothing. Do you mean you've had nothing for dinner, or that there's nothing in your tobacco-pouch, or that you're in such a mood that nothing will suit you? Be cheerful, my friend, be cheerful."

Gaskell made no reply, but sat glaring at the skylight in a most inelegant attitude,



with his slippered feet on the table among a miscellaneous collection of pipes, paints, brushes, and sketches, over which was sprinkled sufficient tobacco ash to show he had done no work that morning.

Torrington himself was quite happy, for, having got over his fit of depression, which he had worked off in making so many sad ends to his own story, he was now inclined to be optimistic, and prophesy joyful things. It was rather piquant than otherwise to see Arthur so gloomy, it made him relish his own pleasing anticipations.

“Poor devil,” he thought, “he has much the same temperament as myself; so I know how he feels. I would bet a sovereign he would like to cut the throat of the universe and drown himself in the result. Well, those who suffer, enjoy. To-day to me, to-morrow to thee. Perhaps, my Arthur, your turn for happiness will come to-morrow; and without much more reason than your moody melancholy to-day.”



The two friends sat for a while in silence, for if Torrington volunteered a remark Gaskell grunted almost quarrelsomely, and the only courtesy he vouchsafed his guest was to throw a box of matches to him when he wanted to light his pipe. Torrington smoked it out and took to humming "*Di pescatore ignobile*" very happily. But suddenly the piano in Armour's studio disturbed his melody with one of the saddest of the songs without words. Previously he had noticed long-continued talking beyond the dividing-wall, but when the music began he turned quickly to Gaskell.

"Who's in there, Arthur?"

"Why, who should be in there," retorted Gaskell, "but the one who's always in there, Mary Morris?"

Torrington's mood changed suddenly; he dropped his pipe, and snatching it up filled it so savagely that it would not draw. He swore as he picked the tobacco out, and puffed violently at it when he finally did get a

light. The cheerful air which had so contrasted with the artist's vanished; he looked anxious and worried; he hummed no more, and made no further attempts to rouse Arthur. Gaskell might have wept if he had pleased without any remonstrance. But he did not let the other see what the matter was, and controlled his voice.

“Has she been in there long?”

“All the afternoon.”

“Hum.” A pause, during which Torrington looked so hard at the wall that he might have been credited with the power of seeing through one. “Do you go to-night to drill?”

“Yes,” said Arthur shortly. For he belonged to the Volunteers, and always drilled on Wednesdays.

“Will Armour go?”

“I dare say. Will you come along?”

For Gaskell was for ever trying to inveigle Torrington into joining his corps.

“No, I think not. But it's time for you

to dress if you are going. It's past four now."

"Well, I suppose I must." And Gaskell got into his uniform reluctantly.

When they left the studio Gaskell knocked at Armour's door, and the etcher opened it himself. He was likewise dressed in uniform, and looked a magnificent specimen of a man in it; for it emphasised the many good points of his robust figure. But his expression was singularly out of keeping with the clothes; it was sad and almost tender. Torrington looked at him and tried to control his own features, though as he afterwards knew his effort was in vain. For at that moment he hated Armour so intensely that he would gladly have killed him. Instead of that he asked him how he was, and was answered in the usual way.

"Are you coming to-night, Armour?" said Gaskell, who had no notion whatever of the dramatic situation in which he was unconsciously filling a useful part, since, had

he not been there, Torrington might have spoken at least part of his mind to Armour.

“No, I think not, I think not,” replied the other, “I cannot go to-night. I am busy.”

And he looked at Torrington in a way the angry lover could not understand, for it was in no way provocative. On the contrary, it was almost entreating.

“Well then, good-night,” said Gaskell, and Torrington, glancing quickly at Armour, forced himself to turn away, saying as he did so, “Good-night,” in a choked and almost inaudible voice. He left Gaskell in five minutes and walked down the lane once more. What did it mean that she stayed there so long? And why should Armour miss what he liked doing, this active drill which was a relaxation from holding tiny tools and the intense occupation of the mind over his delicate work? But then she was to come to him at seven. He would know then. For it was impossible for this to go

on. And what did that look of Armour's mean? The whole thing was impossible; he believed greatly in this man, who was engaged to be married moreover; yet he hated him and was jealous. He began to think that Armour knew; that Priscilla had told him. He went home in a state of wretched impatience, in a fever, to wait those two horrible hours before seven, yes, and a very likely hour besides.

Torrington went round his room and put everything in order; he disarranged his books and arranged them again; he filled his pipe and put it down without lighting it; he went to the window and looked out, staring vaguely at the dim street, which was now wet with a shower of rain. He cursed the weather—it might furnish her with an excuse. He cursed himself for venturing to think she would want one; he went to his looking-glass and stared at himself, noticing how his face was altered since that afternoon. He sat down and tried to write, and

after a few minutes rent the sheet of paper into fragments. He took his hat and went out. It was not yet six. He ran down the lane, and staying at Armour's door imagined he heard voices. He straightened up, set his teeth viciously, and went home again. He sat by the fire doggedly, hearing the slow quarters of that eternal hour pass by, and at seven took to watching for her out of the window. If she knocked lightly he might not hear her, and perhaps the landlady might be out. So he set the window open and stared up the street. The draught from the door, which he had not closed, made him chill and wretched, but he endured that, and even took to biting his fingers, as one does sometimes in extreme physical anguish; sometimes a tear stole to his eye, and he half sobbed, but choked it back resolutely. He called himself a fool, a fool again, and thrice a fool, for of course she would come and explain everything, since she had promised. Yet

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it was a quarter to eight. At eight he went out, and had not reached the end of the street before he turned back. Who could say how late a woman might keep an appointment. He might miss her by a minute. He went to his room again and waited in mental torment, for if she was not coming she would be with that man. At half-past eight he went out again and walked close to his own street door until the quarter struck. He pulled his hat down over his eyes and went straight to Armour's door. The studio was lighted up; there was some one there, he knew that; he listened, and could hear voices faintly. Was it hers or not? The light did not show through the door but shone on the glass roof. If he could but get up and see. It was possible to do it, for the wall ran at an angle which was not hard to climb, and a cart leant against it. It would be easy to look in. Easy, yes, but again no. It was not at all easy, seeing that spying was not



easy to any one with any sentiments of honour, and this would be spying assuredly. Yes, it was a hard thing to do, and—he turned and ran up the lane and leant against the wall to think whether he should do this difficult thing or not. All things were fair in love or war, and this was love *and* war, for he would have willingly seen Armour die that moment. Yet what would a man think who was cool? Would he himself think it honourable if Armour played him such a trick? He set his teeth and cursed through them savagely at the strong bonds with which a man fetters himself, and at his own folly. He cursed the conventional chains which he could not break because he had been taught that in some cases and in some ways it was dishonourable to use his wits and eyes. And seeing all this he turned away. His expression as he did so was not pleasant, and some would have disliked the look upon his face. For a man who is baulked by himself is sometimes



dangerous to deal with, and possibly had he then met Armour there might have been trouble.

At nine o'clock he knocked at Wynne's studio and walked in at the artist's call.

## CHAPTER III.

### IN THE WIND AND RAIN.

WYNNE was writing at his desk, which was in its usual litter with old letters, advertisements, newspaper cuttings, and dirty books hardly ever in their proper places. He looked up, smiled with his eyes, while his mouth remained almost quiescent, and offered his hand without rising. The gas-light was not turned up very high, and the partial obscurity helped Torrington to hide the agitation which in daylight would have been visible.

“Do you mind my staying here a little while?” he asked quietly, but still in a tone which made the other look at him.

“Of course not, sit down and have a cigarette. What’s the matter?”

Torrington stared at the stove and shrugged his shoulders.

“I don’t know what the matter is,” he answered almost despairingly. “I am ill, wretched, and don’t know whether I am on my head or my heels. I should like to cut my throat—or some one else’s.”

Wynne turned towards him.

“Why, old man, this must be something serious. What is it?”

Torrington shook his head in a way which might have been a denial of the statement or a refusal to answer.

“I tell you I’m wretched, more wretched than I’ve been for months. And it’s come on all at once. What’s going to be the end of it I don’t know. But an end will come, I don’t doubt that.”

And he relapsed into an uncomfortable gloom, which was voiceless, having by his

presence and few words succeeded in making poor Wynne, who usually took his own troubles rather quietly, exceedingly uncomfortable. He could think of nothing which would console the man but whisky, and he had none in his studio; a cigarette had been refused, and Torrington seemed disinclined even to try tobacco. He wondered what unutterable folly he had been up to, knowing by this time that there was nothing too wild or foolish for his erratic friend to do, or at least attempt. If some one had soberly assured him that Torrington, having got tired of being poor, had attempted to commit a burglary on a bank, he would certainly have been surprised. But on reflection he would have recovered from that state. Raeburn and he had once discussed Torrington, and that was the conclusion they came to. He, for his part, declared viciously that Wynne was never likely to do anything extremely foolish, that Raeburn was only a trifle better—or

worse—and that such reasonable men must be heartless. He did them both an injustice, and now, if he had seen how troubled Wynne was, he would have been ready to declare it.

After a few minutes' silence Torrington jumped up.

“Do you mind having the door open, I'm nearly stifled?” he declared; and indeed, though his object was to hear if any one passed up the yard or left Armour's studio, he was nearly choked by the violence of his emotion. Wynne made no objection, and he opened the door.

“I see Armour's light is there,” he remarked; “has he got any one with him?”

“I think it's Mary Morris,” replied the artist, who had no notion of what was in the other's mind.

Torrington walked back and sat down, at last attempting to fill his pipe. After a while he returned it to his pocket, for his hands trembled so that he found the task difficult.

“Is there anything between those two?” he asked.

“What, between Armour and Miss Morris?”

“Yes.”

Wynne shook his head.

“It would be a very foolish thing——” he began, but he was interrupted.

“Why would it be foolish?” demanded Torrington, with an acrimony of tone which passed unnoticed.

“Why, because—well, damn it, because it would. She’s a very nice girl——”

“And a good girl?” put in the lover interrogatively, because just now the curse of jealousy made him suspect everything, and Wynne’s opinion was likely to be a true one, seeing he knew her so well.

“And a good girl, as you say,” went on the other, “but for all that she is not the sort of girl.”

“I suppose you mean she is not a lady because she works for her living,” said

Torrington drily. "I wish some ladies were like her, or most of them. But, oh!" and he groaned, "what the devil does it matter to me? I wish to heaven it was to-morrow, or the next day, or a hundred years hence, that I wasn't mad, or a fool, and that I had no soul or no body. Ah!"

He ground his teeth, and having his pipe in his hands broke it convulsively in two pieces. He put them quietly into his pocket and rose.

"Forgive me, old man, I'm all wrong to-night, perhaps I shall be better to-morrow. I'm going. I won't stay."

And in spite of Wynne's remonstrances, for he was genuinely concerned about him, he went off with a wave of his hand. As he stood up the other saw him plainly for the first time. He was ghastly white.

"What the devil has he been up to?" he murmured. "One of these days he'll cut his throat."

And he went back to his desk, feeling

like a man who has been troubled by a ghost.

For an entire hour and a half Torrington walked up and down the hundred yards of street he knew must be passed by the girl when she came home.

The sky overhead was clouded deeply; the rain fell every now and again in scattered drops, which were the forerunners of a wet night; the wind moaned a little, and was still. The street was fairly frequented, and its pavements were sticky with mud and the decaying leaves from a few gaunt trees which were rooted in an old grave-yard and held their branches out into the road across a brick wall surmounted by a rusty iron paling. It was a desolate enough quarter just there, where wealth and poverty met and stared at each other, and the chill atmosphere of the night and the neighbourhood acted on Torrington, and made him more wretched yet. He had no overcoat on,



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and soon was damp with rain, while after Wynne's warm studio the air was cutting, even though there was little wind. He buttoned his coat up to his chin and turned up his collar. He even drew his hat down over his eyes. For, knowing that he was himself short-sighted, he feared lest he might be recognised and avoided, when he meant if possible to come to an explanation then and there. But the time was long, very long. Was it only an hour, only an hour and a half; why, when it struck eleven he seemed to have paced that bit of street a century; he fancied that the passers-by wondered at his remaining, he feared lest the policeman might ask to know what his business was. Finally he began to feel that every one was accustomed to him, he had been there such a time. And suddenly he saw Priscilla and her sister close to him. He actually passed her without knowing it, but catching sight of her delicate profile

in the light of a lamp which threw his own face in shadow, he stayed suddenly, saying "Priscilla."

The girls were hurrying home, for it was late, and they knew that the neighbourhood towards midnight was not always pleasant. When she heard Torrington's voice she started, and stepped sideways involuntarily. For she knew how much he had suffered that night by seeing him there. His very presence in that place told her that he knew where she had been and how long she had remained. She knew, too, that he had expected her; her broken promise had tormented her all the evening, and the tone of voice in which he spoke, though he only spoke the sweet name he had given her, told her how he had suffered through her. She was frightened of him then, almost physically terrified.

"Oh, Mr. Torrington, I didn't see you!"

"No," he answered bitterly, "you didn't,

and I almost missed you myself. I should have stayed here all night if I had."

Then the tone of his voice altered; he suddenly grew nervous, not liking to say too much in the presence of the younger girl. "Yes—yes—but may I walk home with you?"

She nodded, and he walked on with them a few steps in silence. Suddenly he caught her arm and stopped.

"Cannot Alice go on home, Priscilla? I want to speak to you. I tell you I must speak."

"Yes, yes. Go home, Alice," said she. "I will be in directly."

The girl looked at her sister doubtfully, and then saying, "Good-night, Mr. Torrington," disappeared into the darkness in front of them.

"Why didn't you come to me this evening, Priscilla?" he asked, in an imploring tone, which told her how utterly wretched he was, and how greatly he loved her, far better than any words of his had ever done,

though he had spoken many instinct with the very life of the passion which troubled and consumed him. She trembled and tried to speak. He repeated his question.

"I couldn't," she murmured at last feebly, but without looking him in the face.

"You couldn't? You couldn't? Why couldn't you, my darling. You knew how I suffered, you knew I looked for you, you knew I should count every moment, and yet you didn't come. Why was it? Where were you that you couldn't?"

She clasped her hands straightly and looked very troubled.

"You know where I was, Mr. Torrington."

"Yes I know, of course I know," he exclaimed bitterly, "and why were you in Armour's place, when you were to have been in mine? What were you doing there? What claim has he on your time? Is this treating me fairly?"

He tried to command himself, but the

strain was so great that his voice shook terribly, his features were drawn and convulsed, his hold on her arm almost pained her. She rebelled a little against his line.

“Why shouldn’t I be there?” Then she looked at him. “Did you not say you were not jealous of Mr. Armour?”

“Yes, I did,” he returned, “and I was not. Why should I be when he is engaged to be married, and when you don’t love him?” She trembled and almost spoke. “But when I love you and want to marry you, when I have told you so and you know it, when you know that you hold my heart and life in your hand and yet go to him instead of me, how can I help being jealous? Priscilla, I hate any one to look at you. Is it not hard that you don’t love me when I am the first of them all who has had eyes to see your beauty and goodness? And now you are so cold and so careless that you are torturing me uselessly. What does it

mean, and what is to be the end? Tell me now, what were you doing there?"

She trembled more and more, and the tears began to fall in spite of her will to be calm, for his voice and pleading shook her inmost soul. It seemed then that she was cruel.

"I must know, Priscilla. My darling, tell me why you went to him instead of to me. Tell me; you must. Does he know of this?" She hesitated, and again he repeated the question.

"Yes, Mr. Torrington."

"Then you were talking with him about me. Pray did he have anything to say in the matter? Oh, I can't stand this. It is killing me. You are killing me. Priscilla, why did you go to him? You—you—don't love him?"

He spoke with a fierce sudden anger and fury of suspicion. For he began to discern somewhat of the truth. She turned to him in anger.

“Why do you say that? How can I love him? Did I not say I loved no one?”

“What did he say?”

“He told me to do as my heart dictates.”

“Then if you love no one, love me. My dearest, perhaps you doubt me; perhaps you think I don’t mean it. I tell you again I wish to marry you. Say the word and I will marry you to-morrow, and take you away from this horrible climate and this hard cold work which will kill you. My God! how could they leave you at it so long, so long. Won’t you marry me, my darling?” He sobbed a little, but feeling that she was going to speak, he stopped her.

“No, don’t say anything yet, dear. I want to speak to you and tell you everything you are to me. Don’t kill me. You know how I love you. Can’t you see it, can’t you hear it in my voice. It shakes so that I can hardly control it. See what power you have over me. Oh, my darling, my darling!

don't be cruel to me. I can't tell you anything, no, I can't. You must believe it, believe it done, and say you will be kind and marry me. To-morrow, if you will. Now tell me."

And he took hold of her and stopped. He had spoken in a low tone and very fast, though with pauses in which he almost choked. He trembled violently, the perspiration stood in beads on his forehead, mingling with the rain, which fell faster, but fell unheeded. They stood now in her own street.

"Oh, what shall I do! What shall I do!" said the girl, suddenly wrenching her arm from him, and locking her hands together in a gesture of real doubt and despair. He caught her arm again, and felt the slight muscles rigid in a spasm. But he recognised how his appeal shook her, and a sudden joy shot athwart his darkened horizon.

"Do? What shall you do? Ah, dear, it is easy. I am here, and I love you. Marry



me, and you will love me. Yes, do that, do that. Won't you?" and he pleaded with a tenderer voice, which made her tears fall heavily.

"Oh, what a wretched, wretched girl I am;" she moaned, "why should anybody be fond of me, and be so miserable? Oh, I have made you wretched, I know, but I couldn't help it! I didn't mean to."

"I don't care how wretched I am, or how you have made me suffer," he interrupted, "if you will only make me happy now. And you can do it, my beautiful dearest girl, you can—you can make a man happy who has never known happiness, and who never will unless you love him. And you shall love me, yes, you shall and you will. My darling, won't you marry me?"

"I can't—I can't tell you yet," she insisted. "I don't know what to do. I can't tell anything, and everything seems so wretched."

He looked at her, and spoke suddenly.

“Why are you so strange, Priscilla? Ah! it isn’t because you heard perhaps that I was foolish enough to take too much to drink after I left you the other night? Have they been telling you that?”

She shook her head.

“No, no, nobody ever said anything.”

“You know it was quite an accident, and it was more excitement than anything else. I am very sorry. I do much that I am sorry for. Is it that?”

“No, it is not. Oh, what can I do? Everything, everything is so miserable.”

“Put it aside then and come to me.”

She started almost as she had done when he first met her that evening.

“Put what aside, Mr. Torrington?”

“Why, this trouble of yours? You must have one. Come, at least tell me the truth, the truth which I can guess. Don’t you love some one else?”

She shook her head feebly, and again he insisted on an answer.

“But he knows nothing about it,” she said, thus answering in the affirmative to his question.

“Then he does not love you?”

“No.”

“Then give it up, dear; put it aside as I tell you, and come to me. Your heart will come too. Think, I don’t want to bribe you to love me, but think of what your life is and will be. Let me take you abroad, to Italy, dear, where the grapes come from, where there is air to breathe and light to live in. I am poor, but not too poor to do that. And for you I shall work harder and harder. Perhaps, dear, you will be the wife of a famous man one of these days—who can tell? For you a man ought to be able to do anything. Ah, dear, be kind to your lover, who adores you and thinks of nothing else. Put aside the past, the dead, cold, cruel, useless past, and come to me. My heart is warm for you, my poor dear darling. Come to me, speak!” And he ceased his

speech, hoping that he had moved her. Indeed he had.

For Mary Morris was weakened in the struggle ; she knew not what to do against the masterful force of a passionate virility which was able to clothe its being in words such as had never yet been addressed to her. She felt all the ramparts erected for resistance thrown down ; she became for the time almost plastic in his hands ; her very brain reeled, her soul was shaken. She felt the cold desolation of a loveless life on one hand, and on the other a love which was a glory and power in itself ; she saw her future probably lonely and wretched, more wretched perhaps through the wilful destruction of a possible path out of it, and then, on the other side, as it would be spent with him who loved her and was willing to give his soul to make her happy. She knew that she was at the turning-point of her life, and had not the force of mind to make a choice. She had scarcely sufficient resolution remain-

ing to do that which was left to her; perhaps one more appeal would have robbed her even of strength to temporise. For she still had a little dying hope left within her in which Torrington had no share, a hope which she had watered with many tears, for the life of which she had prayed more than fervently, and which she must now trample on and destroy for ever if she yielded to Torrington's entreaties and became his wife. Yes, she loved another, and she said truly enough, as far as she knew, that he did not love her. Indeed, she comforted herself with the thought that he knew nothing of the weakness which had allowed her to give away her heart before it was asked for. She would have died of shame had she thought he knew.

But, in spite of that, to give up all hope ! She could not do it yet. A few more days she must cherish her desire ; a few more times she must weep at night, thinking that possibly on the morrow she would hear the

music of dearer words than any that had yet been sweet to her; and then, if at last it could not be, she would throw this flower away or shut it close in a sealed chapter of her life whose next part might be his who loved her and told her so now in words which made her wretched for very pity. And she spoke, but feebly and with tears.

“I don’t know what to do, Mr. Torrington. You must give me a little time.”

“I will give you all the time you want, dear, though it were years. But do not be so hard on me again. You know you can make me suffer, and you see how you have tortured me to-night. Don’t do it again, dearest. I cannot bear it.”

She knew he referred to her going to see Armour in the way she had done.

“And, dear,” he went on, “will you make up for to-night, and come to-morrow. My sister Mabel will come over and see

you. I know she will love you and you will love her."

Priscilla hesitated. She did not like to be hard upon him again, she was afraid of hurting him, and yet she was afraid of this sister. For, having been a model so long, she knew only too well the way most girls of the middle class looked on them, and she disliked the notion of meeting some disagreeable, haughty woman, who would possibly give herself superior airs. Even if she were anxious to put an end to Torrington's wooing herself, she was naturally disinclined to have any influence used against her on grounds which she herself knew would be unjust. And still it was possible that Torrington's sister might be very nice.

"I am almost afraid, Mr. Torrington," she began; and he knew she was yielding.

"There is no need to be afraid of my sister Mabel," he cried almost joyfully; "if she and my people don't like you I'll cut

the lot for a set of fools and disown them. For I shall come to the conclusion I was only adopted after all. You will come then ? ”

Yet she hesitated, and he took her hand and pressed it. He said nothing but “ Dearest,” and then she yielded.

“ Yes, I will come, but you know, Mr. Torrington, that nothing is settled.”

“ I understand.” And he stood holding her hand in silence for a moment. Suddenly he woke to the fact that it was raining. “ What a brute I am to keep you out now, dear, and it is so wet. Go in, and to-night dream of Italy. Dear, will you kiss me ? ”

He watched her enter her door, and walked away in the last stage of weariness. For as he left the street where she lived the nearest clock struck twelve. For more than seven hours he had been racked with emotion, torn by all the devils of conflicting passions, and tossed to and fro on a vexed



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ocean of storm, whose thunder threatened yet, and whose lightning had shown him far glimpses of a promised land, such as he dreamed of when he slept at last the deep sleep of utter exhaustion. For he hoped again.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A STRANGE AGREEMENT.

It seemed as if Armour had himself spent no very quiet or happy night as he stood at his studio door the next day and looked into the yard, where a stack of old timber stared at him and threatened with no great increase to block his entrance or exit. His face was pale, he certainly had not slept, and he looked worn and anxious. He leant against the door-post in a way that seemed to indicate he would do no work that morning, although he was usually energetic and ceaselessly busy. A few minutes passed in silence, and then Gaskell opened his door, too, and looked out. The neighbours greeted each other with a nod and smile, but, while

Arthur's was a little vexed, Armour's seemed so much graver than usual as to be almost sorrowful.

"I'm glad to see you standing still," remarked Arthur, and Paul looked up as if he had forgotten his presence.

"Why?"

"Because I expected to see you doing sentry go in the yard. What's up with you? All this blessed night tramp, tramp, tramp, shuffle, shuffle, shuffle. Did you hear me knock? I can't find a boot this morning; they are all piled up in a heap of destruction. I've smashed a score of frames, and half my place is splinters of glass. Damn it. I shall have to send in a bill."

Paul smiled vaguely and shrugged his great shoulders.

"I fancy you exaggerate a little, Arthur, but I'm sorry I disturbed you. I heard you knock, but I couldn't keep still, I was so worried about something."

"I'm very sorry for it, old man," said

Gaskell, "especially since your trouble takes that form. Why don't you imitate the fellow who couldn't pay his debts, and let the other man do the worrying?"

Paul shifted his position and looked quickly at the speaker; the remark came so *apropos* that he thought for a moment that Gaskell had somehow guessed what the matter was. "The other man," he knew, *was* doing some worrying. But it was very unlikely that Torrington would have spoken to him.

"Is Wynne up yet?" said Armour, purposely changing the drift of the conversation.

"He would have been if his studio had been next yours, but as it is I think not," returned Gaskell a little drily, without taking the hint. "Don't disturb him, let him sleep for the three of us. It's a new game of odd man out. I hope you'll win it next time."

Gaskell was not often so loquacious in the

morning, but having devoted his enforced wakefulness to the composition of cutting and satirical remarks to be bestowed on Armour, at daybreak his wits were in working order at an earlier period than is usual with brain-workers. As a result, he drove Armour in-doors, for the engraver was in no mood for talking.

About ten o'clock he walked into Wynne's studio and found him doing nothing in particular, for, taking advantage of its being a very dull day, he was able to be idle and virtuous at the same time. It is impossible to gauge the delight of some artists when a London fog renders work impossible and a holiday imperative. But they usually conceal their pleasure by cursing the climate, and, if it is not absolutely necessary to work to finish a picture, they are as unhappy when it clears as a sailor is with the motto, "More rain more rest" when the clouds pass over and it is possible to work on deck.

“ Pretty day, isn’t it ? ” grumbled Wynne. “ I did think it would have been clear, and now look at it. It’s a good thing I have no model coming. What’s that you have ? ”

For Armour held a letter in his hand.

“ Nothing particular, only these people want me to criticise an exhibition of black and white and architectural drawings. I don’t want to, I haven’t the time to spare. Would you, or do you know any one who would ? ”

Wynne shook his head.

“ No—why yes, I mean. I won’t, but Torrington would, I dare say.”

Armour sat down quietly and twisted the letter round in his fingers.

“ Torrington, eh ? Does he know enough, do you think ? ”

“ If I didn’t know differently, Armour, I should think you were a fool. I’m a little younger than you, but if you will take my advice, don’t ever talk in a way which would

make people in any ordinarily intelligent company imagine you believed art criticism required any knowledge."

"You mean as it is carried on at present. Perhaps a little might be good."

Wynne laughed.

"Wrong again, Armour. A little knowledge would make them timid. Now an art critic must not be that—it is as much as his reason is worth, if he has any, which I doubt."

"You are satirical this morning," said Armour, "but you are wrong, and you know it. I don't want to argue so early in the morning, especially when there is business, but I know artists agree no more than art critics, even if their feeling is a truer guide. But another time for this. Do you think Torrington knows enough?"

"Yes, I do. He doesn't know much, but he does know a little. He is not very sure of his own judgment, but he can take a hint

quickly enough. I think he would do it very well."

"Then I'll send round to him."

It was rather early in the morning to bully art critics, and as a rule Armour took no great delight in the unfailing topic of most artists. It is impossible to be an hour in the company of some who paint without a reference leading to a long diatribe in chorus against those unfortunate men who pen the column or column and a half of matter in the papers which nowadays has to stand for criticism. To an outsider who has nothing to do with either profession (Raeburn, by the way, once remarked when they were compared, that the difference was that between the vocations of a dog and a flea), it is amusing to note that though the artists scorn criticism generally, they are always delighted with individual notices. It is on such a frailty that the newspaper-cutting agencies flourish and grow fat. It certainly is not wholly that painters are



so egotistic as to believe that, when they are mentioned, the usually purblind critic becomes keen; something must certainly be allowed for the desire to grow by notices, good, bad, or indifferent, better and better known; yet the fact remains that when these are favourable they are eagerly seized on and devoured, proffered to friends and visitors, and kept sometimes on files, sometimes even in special books, by those very men who are most rabid on the general subject of art critics and their writings. It must certainly be allowed that the artists see better in the daylight of their hostility than in the perturbed atmosphere of praise, and Torrington himself, who occasionally condescended to criticise when funds were low, secretly acknowledged, in confidence, that the profession was an unpleasant fraud, and on one occasion, when asked by a sister in the craft whether he practised it, he blandly but discourteously replied "that he had indeed sunk so low."

Without knowing what Armour had in his mind, Torrington determined to go round and see him. The state of affairs had become intolerable, and indeed impossible. He was not now in any way angry with Paul; it did not appear to him that he had anything to be wrathful about. But he was sure that it was better to come to an understanding with him, seeing the influence he apparently had over Priscilla. He would point out to him that, though he was engaged to be married, it was not fair to him for her to go to his studio quite in the old way.

The fact of the matter is that Torrington more than suspected that Priscilla loved Paul, and yet loved him without hope. He had run over all her acquaintances in his mind, and could think of none whom he knew more likely to attract her. And then she so often went there. But he did not believe that Armour returned her affection; he indeed entirely credited what she herself

had told him about Paul's engagement. He was by no means sure that the man even knew in the least that she was fond of him. He had her word—though, under the circumstances, it was not worth much—her express declaration, that “he” (whoever he might be) “knew nothing about it.” He certainly might be wrong, but after long reflection this appeared to him the true state of affairs.

What was he to do? In any case he must separate her as much as possible from Paul. Armour himself, if he were an honourable man, as Torrington firmly believed, would have no objection to this, if he knew all the circumstances. Yet, naturally enough, John had no desire to inform him of his suspicion regarding the way the girl looked at him. He must get Armour to see that as he himself was engaged, and as Torrington was courting her, it would be only just to put some kind of stop to the customary intercourse

which had grown up during the last two years.

There was one more possibility, and this Torrington refused resolutely to entertain. It was that Armour loved her himself. He discussed the question in his mind, and decided that it was unlikely, besides being extremely unpleasant.

The interview he proposed was not pleasant either. He hardly knew how to begin it, to say nothing of conducting it; he knew so little of Armour, that he had few data to go on. He cut short his troubles by turning down the lane, after buying some flowers for that night, five minutes after William had left it with a message for him from Paul. Without hesitation he knocked at the door, which was standing ajar. Armour received him so much as if he were expecting him that he was surprised.

“You got my message?”

“No,” replied John faintly, for he feared

what might be coming, "I got no message. What is it?"

He stared at Armour and looked so ill, that the other was sorry for him.

"Sit down," he said gently, "and I'll tell you."

Torrington sat down in the leather arm-chair by the stove, thinking as he did so that it was in this chair that he first really saw Priscilla, and that in this she sat last night. Talking of what? Armour stood up by the old piano, and the two men looked at each other for a moment. Torrington would have begun the conversation, but was physically unable; he once or twice moistened his lips with his tongue, but his voice failed him. Yet his eye was clear, and he saw that Armour was pale. Somehow he didn't like that.

"Can you do art criticism, do you think?" asked Paul suddenly, and Torrington for a moment thought he had never heard such a ridiculously irrelevant remark

in all his life. What had art criticism to do with it, he was almost tempted to ask scornfully.

“Art criticism,” he replied at length, when he saw that this must at any rate be preliminary to the other, “I do a little. I don’t know much about it. At least you would think so. Fortunately the public knows nothing, and compared with them I know quite enough.”

“Then perhaps you would like to do the Black and White Exhibition for the —— *Review*. The editor asked me, and as I can’t, and as Wynne says you might like it, I dare say I can transfer it to you.”

Torrington hesitated. He hardly liked being indebted for anything to Armour, seeing that he scarcely knew how soon he might be on hostile terms with him. Then the criticism he had done was so paltry, that he really, in spite of what he said, distrusted his powers.

“I really don’t know,” he replied; “it’s

very good of you and Wynne to think of me, but I really feel rather scared at doing it for such a paper. I might make a fool of myself."

"I don't think you will do that."

"You don't know my powers that way," said Torrington bitterly. "But I suppose I ought to take it. Let me think a moment." He leant his head on his hand, and there was a minute's silence.

There was no doubt he ought not to lose any chance of making money. Besides the cash question, it was of as much advantage to him as to a painter to be advertised in any way, and this would be a signed article. But he really was doubtful of his ability; criticism of any kind was not in his strength, if he had any at all. But then the money. If he were to get married! Ah, that was it. For her sake he would take it.

"I think I'll undertake it, Armour, if you can get it for me. I ought to do as much as I can."

Armour nodded, and Torrington thought how odd it was that Priscilla had really decided for him. Had it not been for her he would certainly have refused.

For some moments neither spoke, though each knew well that the conversation was not yet begun, and would inevitably deal with far more important matters than mere business. Armour could see well how Torrington had suffered, and knew that in one way he had been the cause of some of the pain. Or if he had not been the real cause, yet it must seem so to the other.

Torrington was very strongly influenced by Armour's quiet, kind personality. If he had felt furiously angry with him the night before, all that anger vanished now before a man whose every look and gesture seemed eloquent with simple worth and true dignity. He felt that Armour could be playing no unworthy part in this drama; he believed he was in the presence of a man whose principles of action were far better than his



own; he was sorry to think he had ever done or said anything in his presence which was evil or of evil tendency. But the silence could not last; it became unendurable.

“So you know all about this business,” said Torrington suddenly, glancing sideways at Armour as he spoke.

“You mean about Mary Morris?”

“Yes. I call her Priscilla, but it doesn’t matter. You know?”

“Yes, Torrington, she told me,” he said gravely, still standing against the piano and resting his hand on the music.

Torrington looked up at him and shifted his position in the chair so as to be face to face.

“Do you know she was to come to me last night, Armour?”

“I knew. She said so.”

“It was rather hard on me that she should have been here, was it not, Armour?”

“Yes, I suppose so,” said Paul quietly.

And there was silence again, which he broke, for he felt the implied reproach in Torrington's words and voice.

"I wanted to speak to you about this. I am very glad it has turned out so for some reasons."

"Yes?" said Torrington.

"Because this last fortnight I have been greatly troubled about it. You know I have heard you speak very freely about women here in this studio, and I confess I didn't like it. I tell you frankly you lowered yourself in my opinion, though I had no right to speak to you. And then when I heard that Mary Morris was going to see you, I tell you, I was troubled about it."

"There was no need to be," said Torrington gravely.

"I know that now. It lifted a load off my mind when she told me you had asked her to marry you. For"—he stopped a moment and his face grew dark—"if any

harm had come to her I would have smashed you."

The way Torrington received this was very odd, and betokened the intense preoccupation of his mind. He only shrugged his shoulders slightly and said very quietly, "Of course, of course," as if wondering why such a useless remark should be made. Yet he was usually ready enough to pick up anything which might even require a little torture to twist into the shape of a physical challenge.

"Yes," added Torrington, seeing that Armour had finished, "I acknowledge under all the circumstances that you were right to suspect me. I own I am not quite so good (that's perhaps a euphemism, or rather a litotes, if you'll excuse my pedantry) as I might be. But look here, Armour, now I want to marry her, you must see it is very hard on me that she should come here."

"Yes," said Armour sadly, "I own that."

"Yes, indeed; I tell you it is. What do

you suppose I suffered knowing she was with you all the afternoon. By heavens, Armour!"—and now it was Torrington's turn to look almost murderous, by sympathy with the mood he recalled—"I could have killed you when you came to the door yesterday and said you couldn't go with Gaskell."

"I saw that," said Armour.

Torrington started and looked up.

"You did?" he asked curiously, and in a curiously altered voice. "I thought I controlled my face."

"Not quite."

"Well then, if you saw that, you ought to know how I felt about it. And afterwards, afterwards! She was here all the evening, Armour, and I knew, I knew it. I waited for her outside, and it was eleven when she came out. What do you suppose I felt like?"

Armour's face quivered.

"I know you must have suffered, and

so have I. I haven't slept these two nights."

"What have you to suffer about?" inquired Torrington suspiciously. He received no answer, and repeated his question. Armour tried to speak, and tried once in vain. His voice, when it left his lips, was very low, but it sounded loud enough to Torrington.

"Because—because I'm fond of her myself."

It was a heavy blow to Torrington, though it did not fall quite unexpectedly, seeing that he had considered this as at least a possibility. But it struck him hard enough and he fell back in his chair.

"Armour, this is rather rough on me."

Paul nodded.

"I—I don't understand it quite," said John, almost bewildered. "She herself told me you were engaged. What did that mean?"

Ah! that old convenient fiction had hurt Paul at last, and truth took its revenge. He

never felt so bad about anything in his life before. He leant hard against the piano and made the old instrument shake and rattle ere he replied.

“ I’m very sorry, Torrington, about this. But I can’t help it. You see I’ve had no notion for getting married. I always thought it bad for one’s art. A man ought to give himself up to that until he has thoroughly mastered it. At least, that was my opinion. And you see she used to come here, it’s two years now since it began, and to Wynne’s and Raeburn’s. At last I fancied—I dare say it was fancy—that she was here oftener than at the others’, and I began to fear lest she might possibly get fond of me. You see,” he put in apologetically, “women do get fond of people most unaccountably—most men of thirty must have found that out. So I said to myself it was not fair that I should let it go on, and play the piano to her, when marriage was not in my mind, and I thought the best plan was to tell her

I was engaged already to a girl in the country. I didn't think it was wrong; I think even now it was right. At any rate I did it, and then things went on in the old way."

He stopped and choked a little, and drew the palm of his hand across his eyes as though the light was too strong. But Torrington never stirred.

"I suppose I got used to her. I used to think of her as a sister because I was all alone in London (my people live in the country), and I always advised her as best I could. Then you know how she always did kind little things for us all—for Wynne and Raeburn equally with me; and it was very pleasant to have her round here and see her move gently about this place. I got quite used to her making tea twice or three times a week. It seemed so natural, and nothing disturbed it. I never thought about any end, and I don't think she did. I suppose I was foolish, but then an artist

lives so from day to day, and does not think of these things. She was just the same as light and air. One doesn't ask where they come from, we breathe them in. And then when she told me you had asked her to be your wife it almost made my heart stop. I could not breathe or speak. I couldn't. It was terrible. And I don't know ——"

His voice almost failed, for his emotion was evident. Torrington recognised the gentleness with which he spoke; he envied the purity of his heart and his simple way of looking at things. And yet it seemed that it was to be a struggle between them.

"What?" he asked, when Armour failed to go on.

Paul looked at him and choked a little.

"And, Torrington, I believe, I won't say, but I think that she is fond of me."

John clenched his hands and groaned.

"Then," said he "what are you going to do about it? It is very hard on me, this. You have let her stay at this work of hers



for so long, and now I come you say you love her. What did you say to her?" He stopped and started, half rising from his seat. "You didn't tell her this?"

"No," said Armour, "I didn't think it was right. At least, not before I spoke to you."

"Hum," said John. It certainly was no ordinary man who spoke thus, he knew that. He was afraid that his own honour would hardly have stretched so far, but he could reverence it in others.

"Well, Armour, it seems to me that this is very hard on me. You see I was first in the field, to put it so, and I ought to have a chance. If you speak now I shall have none. I don't think so, for you have known her for years, and if she has any liking for you at any rate you will destroy what little hold I have over her. It seems odd our talking this way, on my soul it does. I wonder whether two men who loved the same woman ever talked so. It would

make a strange enough scene in a book, if one could write it properly. But when you talked with her what did you say ? ”

“ I told her to act as her heart dictates. I asked whether she loved you, and she said she liked you very much, that you were very nice and kind. I told her to marry no one without love, but that if she married you she would have a husband who might do a great deal. For I know you have plenty of ability.”

It was no complimentary speech, but earnestly meant. Torrington received it as a commonplace remark, which hardly called for comment or acknowledgment. For he was so far driven out of his egoism that his very vanity was left far behind, among much worse ruins which might one day be rebuilt.

“ Well, Armour,” he said at last, “ what are we going to do about it ? Are you going to speak to her ? ”

Paul hesitated.

“What ought I do?”

Torrington looked up, and said his next say stubbornly.

“I think I ought to have time.”

“How much time do you want? You are going to see her to-night.”

Torrington stared in surprise.

“Great heavens! And you have had two or three years. I wish to heavens you had married her long ago.”

“So do I,” groaned Paul. “But what time do you want?”

“It’s the end of October now,” said Torrington. “Give me till Christmas.”

It was Paul’s turn to wince now.

“Till Christmas?”

“Yes, till Christmas. I think that’s fair.”

It might have been fair from his point of view, but it was a great demand to make. Yet seeing the strangeness of the situation it might have been expected.

"It's very hard, Torrington," said Paul.

"I know it, I know it, Armour, but what's to be done? Do you want me to give her up? You don't know what kind of a lover I am. Honestly, I don't think my chance is worth much, but I ought to have a good one. I don't want to be unfair. Come now, tell me if you think it's really unfair."

"I don't," said poor Paul, gulping down the terms, though his heart nearly broke.

"Then let it be so."

"But she mustn't come here, Torrington, she mustn't come here. It won't do. It will half kill me. And I shan't be able to keep to my word if she does. You must tell her that she had better not come to my studio. That we have agreed so."

"Very well," said John, though he wondered how he was to phrase the communication without telling too much. Paul

turned away for a moment until a doubt of Torrington struck him.

"You mustn't tell her, of course, that I don't love her."

"You are not supposed to, Armour, so I shall say nothing about it. Then it is a compact."

"It is a compact," answered Armour. He looked at Torrington sadly. "And if I lose her, Torrington, and you win her, why, I shall not blame you, no not at all. I will congratulate you and go on quietly with my work."

His voice shook greatly. Torrington was moved, the tears sprang to his eyes, and yet he spoke very differently, with an accent of passion which was almost painful.

"Could you, could you do that? By heavens! I could not, Armour, I could not. But shake hands."

And the two men shook hands. Torrington sat down exhausted. It seemed to him that he had been through a strange

scene. He looked round him curiously in the darkening studio, for though it was yet early, the heavy sky which had spoiled the morning glow weighed heavier still on the evening. Suddenly he spoke in a curiously sympathetic and soft voice.

“It is very strange, Paul Armour, that we two should be here together and talk as we have talked. I think we are rather strange individuals, both of us ; I know you better now than I did, much better, and I think you know me better too, and will not do me an injustice. I can go in mind outside this studio of yours and look down to see you standing there in the gathering gloom, and myself in this spot which is darker yet. Can you do that ? It is not easy without practice. I wonder — Well, well, it is very strange.”

He sighed deeply and rose looking very thin and pallid. He took his hat and went towards Armour, who did not speak. But he held out his hand as Torrington lifted

his, and they shook hands with a long firm grasp which betokened respect from each to each. And Torrington turned away silently, taking his flowers as he did so.

When he reached the door he stayed and put down his hat and stick. He opened the bag in which the delicate blossoms were and drew out two white and one gold chrysanthemum. He turned towards his rival, and laying them softly on the table, said in a voice which trembled, "May I give you these?"

The door closed on him, and Paul stood staring at the flowers lying there as if they had fallen from the sky above, and a tear or perhaps more rolled down his cheek. Yes, it was very strange indeed. Torrington was right.

## CHAPTER V.

### GOLD AND WHITE CHRYSANTHEMUMS.

THE scene which Armour had just passed through was one of very bitter pain and suffering to him. He was tortured and divided in his mind; anxiety to do what was right, and fear of what the result might be, made him more wretched than he had ever been in all his life. These days were assuredly one of trial to him who had never been greatly tried; and he felt, almost for the first time, the force of a temptation which a weaker or less noble man would have yielded to at once. Ever since the hour when he knew Torrington was on familiarly friendly terms with the girl whom he had called his sister he had



known no rest, but it was only when he learnt that there was a real likelihood of her being taken from him by marriage that he awakened to the knowledge of his own feelings. Unaccustomed by the matter of his work and his nature to self-analysis, he had gone on quietly in the old groove, simply content, as he had told Torrington, to have her near him, shedding about her the sweet influences of her gentle mind, without asking himself why it was she pleased him so, and why he felt lonelier when she went away. But now things had come to a crisis, and he felt that he himself had tied his own hands.

It is true that nine out of ten men in similar circumstances would not have felt as he did ; they would have solved the problem by speaking to the girl at once, without doubting that they were in no way acting dishonourably. And certainly it would be hard to blame them. With Paul Armour it was quite different ; he had a strict code of

his own, he would have felt shamed to break his own laws, and he saw logically enough that all this trouble came from the white lie he had spoken years ago, and from his own blindness. He thought it would be hard on Torrington, who might take the credit, if credit it was, of seeing the beauty and purity of this girl in so strong a light at once as to make him desire to marry her, and relieve her of work for which she was in no way fitted, if he should now step in and claim her for his own. He considered that having offered her marriage and not having been refused, he was entitled to have a clear field until Mary made up her mind. And yet it was very hard to stand by, and by his own act possibly lose her. It may be that he was very sure in his own mind that she was fond of him in her heart, and would be steadfast. Yet she was without hope because of what he had told her years before, and might easily be moved by Tor-

rington, who assuredly had a tongue, and knew how to use it. How heartily he echoed Torrington's bitter wish that he had married her long ago. Now he cursed his art, it was almost nothing to him, and yet for it he had jeopardised his chance—yes, thrown it away it might be.

The two long talks he had had with Mary were hours of avenging fire for him; he was tried to the uttermost and nearly broken. A thousand times the words, "I love you myself," were on the point of being spoken, and each act of restraint was harder yet. But no, he said stubbornly and in anguish, it would not be fair. He had been bitterly unjust to Torrington, he had imputed all kinds of evil motives to him in his own mind, and had even spoken warningly of him to Mary herself. He owed the man some reparation for this; he owed himself some punishment for a too hasty judgment; and now he would add wrong to wrong if he spoke and won her,

and winning her so would be poison in the cup of his joy. No, he must give Torrington a chance.

If John had been of a disagreeable disposition, if he had failed to recognise the sweetness of Paul's character, and had reproached or insulted the man for the part he had taken in the matter, if he had sneeringly inquired what business he had to interfere in any way, Armour would certainly have justified himself in acting entirely as he pleased. But Torrington saw that it was only natural for those who knew her best to take an interest in the girl ; besides, he had a stinging consciousness that Armour had some reasons for thinking ill of him, and hence he mildly accepted Paul as a factor ; and even when he learnt that he loved her too, he was only gently reproachful of the *laissez aller* which had led to this complication. The manner of his speaking and his evident emotion deeply affected Armour, and a conversation

which would have ended in making two ordinary men enemies had, so it seemed, quite a different and unexpected result. For now they both respected each other, and their parting, with its curious gift of flowers and their silent acceptance, sealed, not only a compact, but possibly a friendship in the future with which it had to do.

When Torrington left the studio Paul remained still for a moment, and then looking once more at the flowers touched them as if he doubted their reality. Nay, they were real enough, and this man against whom he had cherished so many bitter thoughts, deeming it dreadful that there should be such as he in the world, had laid them there as a gift to him with a simple and touching gesture, which assuredly had not been premeditated, and which moved him with its natural and almost beautiful eloquence of kindly thought to the very depths of his soul.

He sat down by the table, and laid his

head with its heavy black hair upon his hands, and when he lifted it up his eyes were wet with tears, which were at the one time sorrowful and glad. It is a pleasant thing to see a greater soul than we yet knew in a friend; it is joyful to discern that one we deemed evil has at least the seeds of good within him, though they blossom to no more than a white chrysanthemum and the forgiveness of an unintentional wrong.

Torrington would have wondered a little, had he known what the effect had been upon Armour of an impulse for which he could not account. For a little while in their talk he had felt bitter against him; he had struggled to suppress many an angry speech which came to his lips; he had kept back some reproaches which he might not have been wholly unjust in making; but in the end, and indeed long before the end of their talk, he saw that he was in the presence of a man who would willingly do no

wrong. It is possible that Torrington restrained himself for good reasons; certainly, if he had been in the mood to think of it, he might have felicitated himself on a diplomatic triumph in securing so long a time as till Christmas during which he was to have a free hand; but as a matter of fact he did not think of it in that way, and acted from first to last with no more *arrière-pensée* than comes naturally to the artistic analyst who can divide himself from himself, and stand looking on at his deepest emotions. He certainly felt that no other man in the world but Armour could have acted as he did. Perhaps no other man in the world would have thought of giving the flowers.

In the morning of the following day he received a letter from Paul, which was simply and affectingly worded.

“After you had gone, the way you laid those flowers on the table came home to



me sharply, I cannot tell you how I felt about it. And I felt that I had been rather harsh with you, and thought that I would like to tell you more clearly that if you can win her love fairly I will congratulate you as simply as my nature will allow. I feel now that I cannot do more to atone for the injustice I did you in my thoughts at first. That is all I wanted to say to you. Good night. Don't come round to see me yet.

“PAUL ARMOUR.”

While he was writing it Torrington was making his sitting-room ready to receive his sister Mabel and Priscilla. Mabel was extremely curious to know the girl, and naturally, seeing she was well acquainted with her brother's erratic and impulsive ways, her curiosity was rather fearful. He had never brought over the photograph as he had promised, and though it was a good sign that he desired she should see



her, yet for all that she did not feel comfortable.

“You see, Mabel,” said Mrs. Torrington, “he wouldn’t tell me what she did for a living, and he acknowledged that she wasn’t what the world would call a lady. Though heaven knows what that is nowadays. Yet I think she must be nice. I’m sure I hope so. Though how he’s going to keep a wife I can’t tell.”

And the good lady subsided, sighing.

“I think I can guess what she is,” said Mabel, who was no fool.

“Yes?” said her mother. But Mabel kept her notion to herself.

“I’ll tell you whether I was right or not to-night,” she replied to the questioning affirmative.

At half-past six John met her in the street, walking slowly, and as if doubting to what kind of a neighbourhood she was coming. For she had never been there before. She saw John first and smiled.

"I knew your walk," she remarked.

John laughed a little nervously.

"I dare say you did. I have been told it is peculiar. I was only going out for some tobacco, and should have been back before you got to my place."

"I dare say, John, seeing that if your walk is strange mine is limping at present. I twisted my ankle."

"Yes," said John absently. "Will you walk on? I will run to the shop at the corner; I'll catch you in a moment."

Mabel nodded, and in a minute or two he rejoined her breathlessly, making his condition an excuse for holding his tongue.

"Is she coming, John?" Mabel asked, after waiting in vain for her usually loquacious brother to begin.

"Yes."

"Who is she, John?"

"I'll tell you after you have seen her. It doesn't matter what she is. She'll be my wife if I can manage it."

“Then there is a doubt?”

“Yes; and remember you are not to take it for granted that she is to marry me.”

“I understand; but, John, I can guess what she is. Is she not a model?”

He started and turned towards his sister, who saw she was right.

“Well, she is, I acknowledge; and seeing that I live so much among artists, and can’t afford to marry a girl who has been accustomed to luxury, I don’t think there was much difficulty in guessing. But she’s not like most of them, I tell you.”

“Of course not,” thought Mabel, a little satirically, for his discounting her clever shot was not quite diplomatic. “But what is the doubt, John? I mean, are you not tolerably certain she will marry you?”

“I wish I was,” he returned. “But no, it lies between me and another man, as far as I can see.”

“Has that had no influence on your wanting her?”

“Not in the least,” he declared truthfully. “But here we are.”

“I’m glad it’s not quite such a slum as I expected. Bless me, journalists and literary folks must be getting on since you can afford to live in such a quarter.”

John smiled and led the way upstairs. Mabel came up slowly, one step at a time, and looked round curiously when she reached the room.

“It’s by no means so bad,” she declared, as she sat down. “You have some taste; in fact I think we both have a good deal.”

“I have,” he declared emphatically, “and I shall be able to judge yours better later in the evening. This is her photograph, dear.”

She took it in her hand and looked at it long and critically. It was taken in profile, and was extremely characteristic, though almost sadder than it should have been.

“Yes,” said Mabel at last, when John began to fidget impatiently, “it’s a beautiful though a very strange face. One thing I can tell you, John, and that is if you are not kind to her she will be a most miserable and unhappy woman.”

“I dare say,” said he, carelessly enough, for the possibility of being unkind enters into no ardent lover’s head. “I hope to make her happy.”

He busied himself with getting tea ready, a process which amused Mabel far too much for her to volunteer to do it herself, even if she had felt inclined. Presently, when his very miscellaneous crockery was on the table and the kettle on the fire, he sat down.

“When do you expect her?” his sister asked.

“At seven for half-past, as the invitations say,” he replied. “I said seven, and she agreed, but as she is a woman I don’t expect her until half-past.”

“You needn’t be satirical. I was in time.”

“You’re my sister, and punctuality is a disease with me. You have caught it for once.”

It struck seven, and John jumped up. During the next half-hour he gyrated about the room in such a restless fashion that it would have made Mabel laugh had it not almost made her scream. As a rule there was some repose about his manner when he was not talking; he was even inclined to sit very lazily, but now he was not still a moment. He could not talk, and the conversation which Mabel tried to keep up by asking questions fairly died. When the half-hour struck he took the boiling kettle off and began to roll cigarettes. After tearing three papers in his nervous agitation he dismissed the tobacco pouch into an *olla podrida* of papers behind the main rampart of reference books on his table. Presently

Mabel, who was almost as nervous as he was, spoke.

“I don’t believe she will come.”

“Don’t talk that way. She will come. She said she would most distinctly.”

After a few more intolerable minutes he sat down and rose again.

“Do you know I feel as if I could throw everything in the room out of the window? I am so nervous I don’t know what I am doing.”

He spoke truly, for his hands were shaking and his eyes almost brilliant. And just then there was a knock at the street door.

“I told you she would come,” he said, and darted from the room.

When he opened the outer door she was standing on the step with a little basket in her hand.

“Come in, dear,” he said, and drawing her in he closed the door softly. He did everything gently when she was near.

“Is your sister here, Mr. Torrington?”

“Yes, Priscilla.”

“I have brought her some flowers, nearly all those you sent me and some others I bought just now.”

“It is very kind of you. Come up, she knows you are here. Are you wearing the dress I like so?”

She nodded.

“But, Mr. Torrington, I was half inclined not to, it is so old.”

Torrington laughed.

“That doesn’t matter. I fear it is impossible to teach Englishwomen that they look better in a thirty-shilling dress that suits them than in a thirty-guinea one that doesn’t. And you look like a saint in yours, dear.”

He raised her hand and kissed it. She was trembling like a leaf.

He entered the room first and Mabel rose as he came in, looking, for she was fair and tall, very beautiful in her own simple but



well-chosen dress of yellow grey. When she saw Priscilla follow her brother in, the set smile on her face, which had been cold, and a little restrained, relaxed, and she moved a step towards the girl whom her brother loved. She feared for him no longer. She loved the simple child herself. Ah, who could help loving her !

Priscilla entered very timidly, but looking up into Mabel's face, for the elder girl was somewhat taller, she too was reassured, seeing that this was by no means the haughty young woman who would be only too ready to pick holes in her. She had feared that, in spite of Torrington's assurances that his sister was no Gorgon or Chimaera dire.

"This is Priscilla Morris, Mabel," said he proudly, "and this is my sister, Priscilla, whom I told you of. I know you will be friends."

"I think so," said Mabel, clasping the girl's hand kindly. "I am sure of it."

Priscilla could hardly answer, but her eloquent eyes did more than speak. She took her basket of flowers in her right hand and showed them.

“I thought, Miss Torrington, you might like some chrysanthemums, and I brought these for you.”

“You did, really,” said Mabel; “it is very kind of you. I love them, especially these large white ones. Won’t you sit down, Miss Morris?”

“Yes, after she has taken her cloak off,” cried Torrington; “cloaks and hats will be taken by the attendant without extra charge. Tea for nothing and this cake as well.”

He bustled about in a state of great excitement for a few minutes, and then succeeded in hiding it under an apparently more natural and lazy manner. He had replaced the kettle on the blazing fire, and standing with his back against the book-covered mantel-shelf, he surveyed them both

from his superior altitude. To hide the natural embarrassment of both girls he went on talking about everything that came in his head, although he carefully avoided any allusion to matrimony or artists, topics which he felt were tabooed. Naturally enough he found that as all roads lead to Rome, all subjects came to an artistic end, and more than once it was only by a dexterous twist of talk that he managed to avoid speaking of Wynne or Raeburn. He was glad when he found the kettle was boiling.

“I think you might make the tea, Priscilla,” he said, “it is your natural bent.”

She rose at his word, and did his bidding very sweetly.

“What a pretty name Priscilla is,” Mabel remarked innocently, “and how well it suits you.”

The girl blushed a little, and Torrington smiled.

“It ought to suit her seeing I am responsible for it. I saw at once that it was better than Mary, though that is pretty enough. Now a great many people I know call her Saint Priscilla too. That is a compliment to my perspicuity. No sugar for me, dear. You ought to know that. In my opinion,” he resumed, “the present system of baptismal nomenclature — —”

“A good beginning for an article,” said Mabel, without stopping the flow of her brother’s talk.

“The present system of baptismal nomenclature is founded on an absurd and radically wrong basis. Mark Twain has some admirable remarks on this subject, *q.v.* I think after a parent has satiated his folly on his child by prefixing an absurd list of names chosen on a prophetic principle or for reasons of cupidity (there is always an uncle with money in everybody’s family), it should be made a Board of Trade regu-

lation that he should leave a blank to be filled in by the child itself when it has arrived at years of discretion. But perhaps I grow tedious?"

"I fancy the tea is growing cold," remarked Mabel.

"Thank you, only I hope you didn't mean an occult and recondite pun. Here is your cup. There is a cake. I don't know what it is made of. There is some bread and butter constructed according to common principles. Take some. No, I prefer talking. Was I not saying something about a blank, Priscilla?"

The girl laughed, for she was now far more at her ease.

"I believe you were, Mr. Torrington," she replied.

"How would you fill in your blank, John?" asked Mabel.

"I haven't thought of that, my dear girl, but I dare say Aristarchus."

"Who was he?"

“An art critic who disappeared soon after the first Show Sunday held in Athens. It is reported that he was made away with by a Royal Academician for remarking when he was asked what he thought of a picture that it was a very fine subject. It is supposed to be the first great crime committed by a painter. It is common enough now. I heard of an art critic being killed lately. The detectives of course never went the right way to work. If they had carefully gone through his later criticisms and looked up the record of the men he had slanged, we should probably have been made richer by the loss of a popular artist.”

“You are perfectly ridiculous to-night, John,” cried Mabel, who could not help laughing at his absurdities.

“I know I am,” he went on, “but I can’t help it. It is not often I have such visitors. Do you want me to talk sense?”

“For heaven’s sake, no!” cried his sister.

“Naturally enough I knew it.” And

for a little while he subsided and drank tea.

Priscilla said but very little, and Mabel was not very talkative, but the two girls sat and looked at each other in a way which was entirely satisfactory to John. It was quite evident that they liked each other; he knew Mabel well enough to see that, and as for Priscilla she was as transparent as crystal; he could almost read her soul in her luminous eyes. He was as content as he could be in the doubts which still beset him, but it made him glad to be able to throw one more weight, however light it might be, into the balance of Priscilla's wavering and troubled mind. That she liked Mabel was at least a gain.

At nine o'clock Mabel rose from her chair.

"You know, John, mother is all alone, and it will vex her if I am out late. I must go."

Priscilla thought, with a strange flutter

of the heart, that she was to be reported on; kindly she knew. Mabel turned to her.

“I am very, very glad, dear, that I have met you. I hope we shall meet again soon.”

Priscilla's eyes drooped and were troubled, a warmer glow spread over her face, but she answered sweetly, though in a low tone :

“I hope so, Miss Torrington.”

Mabel held out her hand and it was taken warmly. John hoped that his sister would kiss her, and regretted he had not asked her to do so. Some such thought entered Mabel's head, but she feared that it might perhaps be taken as implying too much, and did not do it.

But her parting words were very kind, and she did not forget the flowers.

“It is quite early yet, Priscilla,” said John, as he helped Mabel with her cloak, “there is no need for you to go for a while. I shall not be ten minutes.”



When the brother and sister reached the road Mabel took his arm.

“You were quite right, John, she *is* very sweet.”

“Ah! is she not?”

“I don’t think her quite so beautiful, I dare say, as you do; that would be impossible; but she is lovely and of a very uncommon type. And she is as good as she is beautiful.”

“Thank you, dear,” said John gravely, and felt more drawn to his sister than he had ever done, although they had been close friends for years.

“I hope it will be all right,” Mabel resumed after a while, “but I fear she is delicate.”

“I will take her to Italy,” said John. “I can just as well make a living there as here, and it would be cheaper even than London. Then you are pleased, Mabel?”

“Yes, dear.”

A ’bus came along and he put her in it.

As he did so a group of vulgar girls standing at the corner exclaimed, "Well, why don't you kiss 'er?"

Torrington laughed.

"Exactly so, Mabel," and kissing her, he bade her good-bye.

## CHAPTER VI.

### WHAT JOHN DID NOT KNOW.

JOHN TORRINGTON went back to his room in a happier frame of mind than he had known for two days at least, for although still consumed with doubt as to the main event, he was easier on one score at any rate. Should he get married, it was evident his mother and Mabel would receive his wife gladly. If he could only make sure whether she loved Armour or not, he would be at rest. If she did not he was sure he could win her. But if she did?

This was his great trouble. To what extent was he justified in continuing his courtship now he knew Armour loved her, if she returned the affection which he felt

was at least as sincere if not so fervent and passionate as his own? He knew himself, and did not know Paul; he was perhaps justified in thinking his own love the greater. Yet he had to ponder two things. Would it not be robbing the other man if he induced Priscilla to marry him, believing, as he really began to believe, that she loved Paul? Yet he did not *know* it; he kept on repeating to himself that it was only his opinion. If he really believed it, he said, but did not go on. Then was it not wrong to marry a girl who loved a man who loved her again, when a single word of his would set matters right? He kept arguing with himself by night and day, and for ever came to the conclusion that since he did not absolutely know Priscilla loved Paul, while he did know he loved her himself, he was justified in doing the utmost for himself. It is quite possible that even if he had felt no justification he would have still persevered, for passion now had a

strong hold upon him, and seemed to walk hand in hand with destiny.

When he returned to his room, thinking perplexedly all the way, which was doubly dark to him, she who looked like its mistress seated there was so bright and beautiful, even in her subdued gentle melancholy, that he forgot his scruples and thought of nothing beyond the narrow walls which barred out the world from them for awhile. She looked up from her low chair, which was drawn before the fire, and smiled gently. He did not speak, but sitting down beside her stroked her hair with a tender gesture, and raising her hand kissed it reverently.

“What are you thinking of, dear?” he asked presently, in a low voice, which, softened by her influence and sweet presence, was musical and pleasant.

“Of your sister, Mr. Torrington. She is lovely, and I think I should love her.”

“I hope you will, Priscilla. But”— he

bent towards her—"can't you call me John?"

"I will try, Mr.—John," she sighed, and he echoed it in sympathetic response.

"Is she very fond of you, John?" she asked presently.

"I think so, dear, and all the way I went she talked to me about you. She thinks it no wonder that I love you, my darling"—she bent her head—"and she loves you already."

Mabel had taken the girl's heart by storm, for desiring to please her brother, whom she loved and admired and yet often feared for, she had done her utmost to please Priscilla. She, poor girl, in her hard life had very rarely met a lady on terms of equality, for those she had known in studios, even though they liked her for her superiority above her class and most apparent purity and sweetness, had never come so near her as her lover's sister. It was a little flattering that she, whom Priscilla

deemed beautiful, should praise her loveliness; it was grateful indeed that she should like her. For Torrington spoke the truth, and the girl believed him utterly.

“Perhaps, dear, you will know her well some day, and my mother, too, perhaps.” And his voice failed to a whisper which was instinct with passion, like a warm wind breathing in a summer woodland.

“Ah, Priscilla!” he asked, “did you ever sit by any one who made tender and gentle love to you, who kissed your hand as I do, and stroked your beautiful hair. Did you ever?”

She bent her head again and looked in the fire.

“No, Mr. Torrington.”

“Priscilla, though I am still full of doubt and fear, for I cannot tell whether your heart will incline to me wholly, this is a very glad hour in a life which has not been joyful. I feel as if the cruel and evil past had gone for ever. Though I have never

been a good man, I feel as pure as snow. Yet I am as ardent as fire, dear. You will not try me too long, will you?"

Priscilla moved her lips, but could not speak. His tone and looks, far more than his words, though they were not ill chosen, melted her soul. If it had not been for the old cruel sorrow and the withering hope, she would have turned to him and wept with her head upon his breast, saying, "I will try you no more, John, I will try you no more. It is very good of you to love me. I am so weak and so weary that your strength will lift me up. For I am like a tired child, dear. I am very glad now."

But her grief had not yet become as white as death; hope, though it trailed in the bitter dust, had a green leaf still, and might revive at last.

He slipped quietly from his chair and knelt beside her, taking her hand as he did so. She made no motion or remonstrance. And he looked deep into her soul.



“Put it aside, dear, put it aside and come to me. I know your trouble, but put away the cruel past. Does it not seem hopeless to you—what is the good of wearying in anguish for the irrevocable? In place of that I am here. dear love. I love you; my heart is warm for your chilled hands; my soul is fire to revive your own. Don’t linger outside when there is a home for you—a home which will be no home till you come at last. Priscilla! Priscilla!”

She opened her eyes, which had been covered by their transparent blue-veined lids, and they were bright with unshed tears. Yet he saw she was his not yet.

“My darling, I can look deep into your heart, and read your inmost soul.”

She started very slightly; it was rather a mere motion or quiver.

“What do you see?” she asked, with a timid distrust of herself, which was very touching.

“I see the past, dear, and I see you are

wavering now. My darling," he said strongly and triumphantly, "I can read your very thoughts."

Surely enough he could, for he knew by sympathy, by intuition, or some unknown faculty, knew absolutely beyond contradiction that she did love Paul Armour. It was strange that he should speak in the tone he did, yet it came from his pride that he knew her so well; never before had she been so open a book, never before so magically, so crystally clear. She had been disturbed to his vision, and opalescent; she was now diamond-like. It seemed as if his sudden power over her made her his. For if he could read her henceforward it would be easy to win her in spite of Paul, of herself, of the world.

"What do you see?" she said again, trembling, for she almost believed him.

He kissed her hand.

"I see nothing that might not be in your heart, Priscilla, for long ago I knew you

were like gold for purity. I see a dark vision of the past, and vain hope, and suffering which you owed not to yourself. I see how pain struck you, and I know how you quiver yet. For all I see I love you better. For, dear, I am sorry, and only entreat you to forget what is vain."

She closed her eyes once more. Oh, was it vain? she moaned in her heart. Oh, that it was! She suffered so at the destruction of her luminous royal city of hope, that she would have rejoiced in anguish to behold its last imperial obelisk cast down as she went blinded with tears to sow its discovered foundations with forbidding salt. Oh, the cruelty of all things! She or this man must suffer much; she did not pity herself so greatly, though she was so femininely weak, that she could not spare the hem of her sombre mantle of sorrow for his bowed head of anguish. It was a bitter thing for her who was so helpless. He seemed to know her thoughts by intuition, and passed

his arm about her waist. She moved and was reluctant, though not alarmed.

“Don’t trouble so, my transparent lily, my own soul,” he said very softly; “let me make the decision for you. I can see so well, that though you are at the parting of ways, you have no strength for choice; for though one seems dark you know it leads you home, and the lighted path is very far to travel. There may be no joy at the end. Let me decide for you. Come to me, dear, come to me.”

She trembled violently, the tears rose to her eyes and overflowed, dropping softly like dew from the flower with which he compared her.

“Don’t, Mr. Torrington, don’t. Leave me, leave me alone, please don’t touch me. I don’t know what to do. I don’t know what to do.”

He did her bidding and rose. But while on his knees he kissed her hand, although his passion was for her lips and her doubting

soul. He stood by the fire and looked down upon her, with his breast heaving and his eyes wet. He had almost forgotten Armour—Armour, who was suffering tortures in his trodden studio, because he knew that she was now with Torrington. He had changed places with him, and knowing his own suffering almost wondered that the other had borne it so well and spoken about it so very gently. He might not have thought so of him had he known John's conviction as to the way the current of the girl's soul set. For Torrington's stubborn self-excusing "I do not really know," would have seemed to his single-minded heart sophistical and false. For assuredly the vision of intuition was more powerful than an invincible deduction of logic from known facts.

Torrington had almost come to the end of his rhetoric of persuasion—he could scarcely speak more. It seemed vain, though he knew it was vain only in seeming, and certainly had an effect. It was not that he

might not have urged her more, but he feared wearying her as he had almost exhausted himself. He was physically tired; the strain of mind, the intense stress on his brain during that strangely lucid period, had been terrible, leaving him almost without strength. It was like the prophetic fervour and struggle of a Pythian Priestess, borne onward to deliver herself of inspired words whose difficult and awful utterance left her lifeless on the floor of her mephitic cavern. He had come to himself, and was no longer inspired. He was a mere mortal and sorrowful with doubt. But he had received his own message and knew he had spoken truly. Like many another he regretted his Delphic journey, and hated the knowledge which made him doubt his own honour.

The silence fell about them intensely, and was broken at last, with the spell that held them, by the old church clock, which struck eleven with a long interval between each stroke. Priscilla rose as the last boom died

away, and Torrington, as though moved by the same motives, imitated her mechanically. In silence he helped her with her cloak and handed her her hat. Ere she put on her gloves he lifted both her hands to his lips and kissed them one after the other, letting them go softly and reluctantly.

But there was one more thing he must speak about. He must tell her not to go to Armour's. Yet it was very hard to put the matter in such a way as to prevent her seeing that Paul Armour loved her himself. But it had to be done.

"There is one more thing I wanted to speak to you about, and that is about your going round to the studios. I have no right to interfere in anything you do, dear, but I love you so that it is very hard to see you with men who do not look on you with the same eyes as myself. Is it not?"

She stood before him putting on her gloves, but she did not answer. Her eyes were cast down.



“Of course Armour knows now how matters stand. I told him myself yesterday.”

She winced a little.

“And he agreed with me that it would be better for us all if you did not go there so often. Is that not right, Priscilla?”

“I suppose so, Mr. Torrington,” she murmured, and lifting her hand again he kissed it. She moved slowly towards the door.

“I will go with you, of course,” he said, and took his own hat, leaving the lamp burning. In a moment they were in the street, down which the wind blew keenly. He placed her arm in his and walked on slowly. She could feel his heart beat, and ever and again she quivered a little. But he knew it was not with the cold.

“Before I see you again I shall write,” he said, as they stayed before her door. “But, dearest, think of me kindly, for you



know now how greatly I love you. Oh, be good to me, be good to me ! ”

His voice failed, and he pressed her hand. He turned away, and then suddenly back again to press her passionately in his arms. He broke away and went down the street blinded with tears.

In the morning Priscilla received a letter, if letter it could be called, which made her weep as well.

“ My love, my tender beautiful love. I don’t know what to say to you, I cannot tell you my thoughts, you wrap me round like flame ; I am weak before you, and weaker when you go away. But you never go away. You are seated now in this chair of mine. My love is there yet with her beautiful pale face which is so pure and delicate, and I see the ripples of her wavy hair still. May all the bright influences of the bountiful sky pour down upon her and bless her for ever. See, my heart, how

beautiful she is. I kneel before her and look at her reverently and tenderly. I can see the delicate lids covering her eyes which are heaven to me, and now they open a little and I can see her soul. It is a beautiful flower which is troubled now by bitter rain and wind ; but soon, very soon, it shall blossom in more blessed roses than my garden ever saw. Oh, my love, my love ! be kind to me, be kind to your lover, who loves you so. How much you have done for him, how much more you can do ! I am not the same man I was this early spring. I have come to a summer of great promise. Do not destroy my fruits nor beat down my foliage.

“My love is a strange blossom. I do not know whence she came. Heaven sent her I think. I know she is heavenly.

“She has given me my sight, and made me anew. I love her. That is the reason.

“I know now what love is.

“Without her, life will be nothing. Believe this, and believe me. With her—but I cannot speak.

“I said to-night ‘be good to me.’ I say it again and pray it. Good night! good night!”

And as she read it, Torrington read Armour’s letter too. It made him choke a little, and he said to himself, “I wish I was like him.” And then he clenched his teeth and added, “But then I do not really know.”

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE BROKEN COMPACT.

IN spite of the letter which Armour wrote with all his heart to Torrington, it would be too much to say that he did not regret in some measure the generosity which had allowed his rival so much time to prosecute his courtship. All kinds of doubts assailed his mind. Was he after all so sure that Priscilla was more inclined to him than any other? He had been certain of it once, but now he thought that that certitude might have been founded upon nothing real. Even if she had been fond of him her affection might have really become sisterly. Such things were possible. Then he felt afraid of Torrington's methods, and he

did not know what license he might take ; he wondered whether he would abide by the spirit of their compact, and hint by no word or deed that Armour at least could not love her, whatever her own feelings might be, or would he only keep its letter? Again he was alarmed when he reflected that Torrington must certainly know a good deal more about women than himself by reason of the different lives they had led. In his comparative innocence and inexperience he had never learnt that such knowledge is almost always delusive; that though a man can possibly learn the inmost heart of one woman, his experience may be utterly valueless with another, and that though he were Solomon as to his wisdom and his wives and Methuselah as to his age, a maiden in her purity might baffle the sagest *roué* of the Regency.

It is true enough, sadly, that almost any woman may be won by unscrupulous methods unscrupulously pursued by a man who is not

repulsive, who has the wit to wait and to watch, and who has the militant instinct for the moment to attack. This *almost* does not always exclude those who are cold and passionless, for such are not less, but rather more, endowed with vanity than their weaker, warmer sisters, nor those who are passionately religious. It is a curious fact, though painful in a cold-blooded analysis of general cases, that these last are often easiest won. As they believe fervently they can love fervently, and loving so can repent in equal measure, shuddering with a perilous joy when they have once more become reconciled to the Church. Their lovers are doubly dear to them, since it was for their sakes they ran the risk of perdition; and having once gambled for their own souls the game becomes dreadfully attractive. The lives of women are too wholly devoid of excitement; it is only too natural that they should crave for it; yet the lovers and husbands who desire it for themselves deny

it to their women, and by imprisoning a soul make it desirous of escape.

Armour, who troubled himself with no such reflections, which he was incapable of making, and which would have been abhorrent to a man of his views with regard to the other sex, was solely concerned with the side that might be termed the art of courtship, in which he believed himself deficient, and in which he credited Torrington with a degree of some standing. His peripatetic lucubrations nearly led to a breach with Gaskell, who was a light sleeper, and objected to hearing a heavy man tramp ceaselessly up and down the adjoining apartment from before midnight to the break of day. He looked at Armour rather sulkily after the third night.

“Well, I took my boots off,” said Paul apologetically.

“I wish you would take yourself off,” muttered Arthur, “it’s more the shaking than the noise. To have fourteen stone

going to and fro all night in these wooden shanties is too much. I hope that nothing is wrong, Armour," he added more courteously, seeing that the other was really looking ill.

"Only a little sleeplessness. I dare say it will soon pass off."

He went in and made a cup of tea. Eat he could not, and scarcely tried, for when a man suffers from mental torture he is in no mood to attempt the cooking which most artists are more or less adepts in.

It was quite a week now since Paul had had the conversation with Mary Morris ending in her confession of Torrington's offer of marriage, and all the work that he had done since then was worse than nothing, for he had spoilt a plate by leaving it so long in the bath that no "faking" could make it worth further labour. He had little desire to work, he was so wholly whelmed in this great trouble that all the benign influences



of art left him unmoved; the world and fame were no more desirable; this girl whom he had beheld come and go with the same equal and natural pleasure that he took in the return of the day was now as that same dear light is to one who fears he shall suddenly become blind and behold the sun no more.

Yet in all this overthrow of his usual life, with all the pain that this possible loss might bring to him, with all the visions of pleasure that he hoped to win, he was not utterly divided from his steadfast self of the days before doubt came in. He did not believe that life would be nothing to him without this girl, he did not say to himself despairingly and with the anguish of passion that he should neither do nor care to do the labour, which it was his right to accomplish, if Torrington should win her love. He knew he would accept the decree of destiny calmly, with sorrow indeed, but with a sorrow that would leave him not less

than he had been, perhaps even greater by the overcoming of himself. And this was just what Torrington, for his part, did not believe. Whether such a refusal to accept what was fated and move on henceforth as calmly as before was a sign of a greater passion or a less equally-balanced intellect it is hard to say. Torrington would naturally have preferred the former solution, and no doubt the evidence he had of Paul's frame of mind was not without its influence on his course of action. For he was certainly inclined to believe that Armour's love was less than his own.

He might not have come to that conclusion if he had seen Paul this morning. A day had elapsed since Mary Morris had met Mabel, and now, as Armour knew, she was to sit for West, who was anxious to proceed with his portrait relief, and finish it before beginning other work which he expected to obtain. Armour grew miserable thinking that Mary would be in the lane

and would not come over, that he by his own act had requested her not to. He had said he could not bear it if she did, while he had this seal of silence on his lips. He clenched his hands and teeth. Why had he so far yielded as to make such a compact? Yes, but it was right after all that he had done so. How hard it was that she was to be so near. Why was West's studio not at the other end of London instead of here, for if she were not close at hand it would be easier to say nothing and endure.

Why, she must be there now! The perspiration broke out on his forehead and rolled down in heavy drops. She might be thinking as she sat that he had forbidden her to see him. Suppose she loved him as he thought, how would she take that, what would she think of it, and what conclusion, what logical conclusion, draw from it? He had said he was engaged, he knew that Torrington was courting her, and was naturally loth to see her so friendly with

another man. She would think that in his indifference he had said very well, let her not come, and that he had gone humming to his work, glad perhaps that she might be happy, but not a whit less happy that another was to make her so. She would think this very naturally. He had said to Torrington that he must not tell her he did not love her. Even if Torrington did not, and acted up to the spirit of the words, it was in its consequences no less than telling her so. There was no other conclusion to come to. Fool that he was he had destroyed himself, and now, if indeed she loved him, while the skilled and patient hand of the sculptor transferred her lineaments to the marble, her warm heart might be turning in anguish to a very stone. It was maddening to think so. He paced up and down regardless and thoughtless of what Gaskell or any other might think.

“Yes,” he said, “she ought to know. I am put out of it. It is not fair to me.

What did I promise? That I would give Torrington till Christmas to win her if he could, and that I would not see her till then, except occasionally perhaps in an ordinary way to prevent any remarks being made on her suddenly ceasing to come here. There is no reason that I should not see her now if I want to. None."

He wiped his brow and stopped. He could see well whither he was tending and was afraid of himself. He wanted to do what was right and yet—— No, he would try to work. He might as well have tried to hammer cold bronze into a statue. He threw down his tools in despair and rose. For he could see her standing white and still in the near studio, and could see nothing else. He flushed burning red and went white as ashes. In another moment he was in West's place. She was there, and was pale, ah! very pale.

"I want to speak to Miss Morris a moment, West," he said, in a strange voice which

made the sculptor aware that something must be wrong. So he nodded and went into the next room. Paul stood opposite the girl without offering her his hand. Both were deeply agitated, but neither so greatly as to miss seeing the trouble of the other.

“Have you seen Mr. Torrington, Mary?” he asked breathlessly, “and did he tell you the agreement that we came to?”

“Yes, Mr. Armour,” she faltered.

“That you were not to come to see me, and that he was to have till Christmas?”

She bent her head and grew yet whiter, shaking in every limb.

“Then” said he, “I want to tell you you mustn’t think I said that because I don’t care for you. I must tell you—though I am going to keep to what I said to Torrington, who is a fine fellow after all, and I like him—that I have always loved you, though I didn’t know it till now when I feared to lose you. I haven’t been able to think of

marrying until just now. I didn't think I could afford it. Now I can, I can, and I love you, I myself. Don't answer me, I don't want any answer. But remember this, and if you are not his wife I shall ask you to be mine. That's all I wanted to say."

He uttered it in one breath, speaking terribly fast, with his face blazing with excitement. It was over in a moment, and then he wrenched himself away, leaving Mary like a marble statue for whiteness, but like an aspen leaf for its quivering. He ran back to his studio and stood staring at the wall blankly. Had it happened really and had he spoken? And had he done right? He fell into the great chair and trembled like a child. For suddenly after this hot fit came the cold one. Would Torrington think that this was keeping his word? He groaned, and was even without the comfort he might have hoped to win. He had not been able to read the girl's

scared face, and indeed, if he read it at all, its strange script bore evidence that she loved Torrington and not himself.

When West came out of his larger apartment he found Mary standing in the attitude in which Armour had left her, though her head was a little turned towards the door, which he had not wholly shut. She looked dazed and quiet, but so altered even from that troubled self which he had grown accustomed to of late that he was thunderstruck. He went up to her and took her hand. She looked at him piteously and burst into tears.

“Sit down, sit down, my dear girl,” he said kindly, for he was troubled by her trouble, “and don’t cry.”

She obeyed his word and sat down. She was in so strange a mood that she might have obeyed any order like some cataleptic patients. But even when she was seated she still shook with agitation, and the slow large tears rolled down her face.



“I wish these fellows at the devil,” said West to himself; “it’s little good work I shall do to-day. I wonder what the matter is now, with Armour coming in like a fiery comet and going away leaving destruction behind him. Torrington has a finger in this pie, I’ll swear.”

For he had learnt as much from the girl, though not directly.

“Would you like to go home, Mary?” he asked, after waiting for a while to give her a chance to recover her self-command.

“I don’t know, Mr. West; don’t you want me?”

“I’m not quite a brute, and you’re not fit to stand for me, that’s quite sure. You would be ill.”

“And she will be yet,” he muttered, “if this goes on much longer. Poor girl, poor girl! I must make Armour tell me about this. They are killing her between them. Mary,” he added, “come round with me to the restaurant. It’s nearly time for

lunch anyway, and it will do you good to have something."

For among artists it is the custom, when they have a model for an all-day sitting, or sometimes with a full morning one, to give lunch as well as the charged fee.

"I think I'd rather not, Mr. West," said she feebly.

"Don't talk nonsense. I know better. You come with me."

He turned down his shirt sleeves, shook some of the marble dust out of his head into his beard, where it lodged conspicuously, put on an old coat, and brought her her hat and cloak. When they were in the street he insisted on her taking his arm.

The restaurant, which was so much frequented by the artists in the neighbourhood that they considered it their peculiar property, was kept by a pleasant little woman named Mason, whose husband was a worker in brass. In the front shop was an assortment of sweets and cakes, and on

the counter stood in summer large jars of lemonade, that at this season had given way to "hot drinks." It was ostensibly a confectioner's and baker's shop, but the sweets and bread were both bought wholesale, and without the assistance of half a score of hungry artists who were not particular as to cooking the counter trade might have failed to pay the rent. The back room was the eating place. In it four marble-topped tables were usually thronged about one o'clock with occupants, who made fun of some curiously inartistic lithographs hung as advertisements on the walls. Wynne, Raeburn, West, Monk, and several others were regular attendants, and Torrington was much at home there. The usual waitress at the table was a merry fair young married woman, who knew all the men by name, and taking their chaff and love-making in good part, chaffed them all back, pretending to like no one in particular. It was regarded as a curious question as to

who her favourite was. No doubt he chuckled to himself as he heard other claims put forward. Her name was Emily Wharton, and she was known variously as Mrs. Wharton, Emily, Milly, or Blue Eyes, while for some occult and unexplained reason West, who growled more than any one there, gave her the title of Berlina. Perhaps he himself would have failed to give the etiology of this compound. It was she who was in the shop when West and Mary entered it.

“You are early,” she said saucily, and then noticing Mary, whom she knew, she cried, “Dear me, Miss Morris, you do look ill this morning.”

West answered for her.

“Miss Morris is not well, and I have brought her here to see if we can’t make her well again. I fear I have been making her work too hard, and my studio is very cold to-day.”

“I dare say,” said Milly coolly; “if you

are as uncomfortable in your own place as you are here it is no wonder any one is ill. What will you have, Miss Morris? Shall I run out and get you some wine?"

"Nonsense," said West, "wine be hanged. Go and get some brandy."

Mary lifted her hand in remonstrance, for it seems to be part of the modern code of morality that every woman shall refuse spirits at first. West took no notice of her objections and steering her inside the room made her sit down, while Milly went out for the brandy. When it came he ordered dinner, and kept on talking in order to keep Mary from thinking.

"Berlina, Berlina, bring the mustard!" And then, "What do you call this?" pointing to three or four scraps of something on a plate.

"That is beef," said Mrs. Wharton.

"I'm glad to hear it is. I should never have suspected it from its appearance or taste," said West.

“You always grumble, Mr. West. I wish you were like Mr. Wynne or Mr. Torrington.”

“Hang Torrington,” thought West; “why will Fate drag his name in?” And he relapsed into silence for a moment.

Mary Morris tried to eat a little, but could not succeed in swallowing a morsel. Yet little by little she grew calmer, she shook less, her colour grew less painfully white. The mention of Torrington’s name had been no shock to her, for although West was not aware of it, Milly Wharton knew of his courtship, first from observing him when he came into the same place with Mary, and afterwards by talking to the girl herself. She had indeed curiously enough constituted herself Torrington’s champion.

“Will you marry him?” she asked one day.

“I don’t know,” answered Mary.

“He’s a very nice fellow, I think,” said Milly, for she had always found him ready

to take what was offered him, and while he was never dull, he did not speak sufficiently to prevent her having a large share in the conversation, which she loved.

“You take my advice and marry him. You might do worse. He is a gentleman, and I think he’s good-looking.”

“Yes,” Mary had answered. “Perhaps I shall.”

And after that the little woman took a great interest in both of them, though perhaps Torrington came in for the greater share.

When West had finished his meat he inquired for pudding. Hearing there was only rice he sneered a little, but ended in ordering some. At the second mouthful he bit something hard and roared for “Berlina.”

“Here, I’ve broken a tooth, I believe. What d’ye mean by putting pebbles in your pudding? I won’t pay for this.”

Milly came in bustling, but taking the



ejected matter from the side of the plate she discovered it was really a stone. For a moment she looked crestfallen, but glancing at West's beard her expression changed.

"I think you ought to comb yourself before you come here, Mr. West. I believe this is a piece of marble. There is a lot more in your beard."

It was West's turn to look bad. He put up his hand, and three or four small chips fell tumbling into his plate. He pushed it aside with a hasty "pshaw," and left it unfinished.

"Would you like to stay here a little longer, Mary?" he asked, "for I must go back. I expect somebody soon."

He left her there and paid "Berlina" at the counter, and went swinging out of the shop jauntily. Soon afterwards Mary went home.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### BOHEMIANS.

IF Torrington had dined as he usually did at Mrs. Mason's, Emily would have told him that Mary Morris had been there with West, appearing to be very ill. He would have gone instantly to see her, and if he had discovered what had happened he would doubtless have been more than merely angry at the step which Armour had taken. As it happened, however, he went to Gaskell's place and remained there for lunch, which Arthur sent out for, and for which he insisted on paying.

"I can't think what's up with Armour lately," said he, "there must be something

wrong. He walks up and down his studio all night."

"Yes," said Torrington, helping himself to bread.

"And I throw boots at the wall till he takes his off and goes pad-padding about like an elephant."

"Ah, he's got insomnia, I dare say," said Torrington, who was from one point of view pleased to hear of Armour's restlessness. He could not be very sure if he were so troubled. If he had known to what a step this trouble had driven Paul he would not have been quite so complacent. He was ready enough to deceive himself, and since his last talk with Priscilla he had become quite hopeful; the way she had received his words had been, he thought, encouraging; her great and manifest liking for Mabel was certainly so. He even got to the point of being sorry for Armour. So he hummed an air quite merrily.

"You seem cheerful enough," said

Arthur. "What's up? Have you made any money?"

"Have I made any money?" repeated Torrington scornfully, feeling in his pockets. "What do you take me for? You will be asking if I have got my watch out of my uncle's waistcoat pocket next. How much do I owe you?"

"I didn't ask you for that," cried Gaskell angrily.

"I know you didn't, but is it seven and eightpence or eight and sevenpence? I know it's one or the other."

Gaskell shrugged his expressive shoulders.

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Then we had better say eight and sevenpence," was Torrington's remark. "Have you got one and fivepence?"

"Yes," said Gaskell, handing it out.

"Then I'll have it. Now I owe you half a sovereign."

Gaskell looked rather surprised.

"I thought," he began, and then stopped.

"I hope you didn't think I was going to pay you," said John, looking alarmed.

Gaskell nodded ruefully.

"I'm awfully sorry, old boy. Is the seventeenpence all you have? Yes. Well then I'll lend you sevenpence out of it. That'll be nine and fivepence, as William says."

The transaction was somewhat ludicrous, but very characteristic of the intercourse between these two men. Nor was the next incident more infrequent.

"Got any tobacco?" said John.

"No."

"Well I have."

He threw a pouch over to his friend, who caught it in time to prevent the capsize of a bottle of Chinese ink, and made a cigarette.

"I shall devote your tenpence to paying for that weed," said John, laughing. "I told the old lady at the corner shop that I had no change. I looked as important as if

my purse was full of cheques and notes, but it was strictly true that I had no change all the same. I hadn't a cent."

He smoked a pipe while the other consumed several cigarettes in rapid succession. The conversation flagged, and both took refuge in a rather sombre silence, which was broken by the appearance of the boy from Mason's. He took away the dishes. When he was gone Gaskell carefully closed the door after him. The reason was soon apparent when a knock came to the door. Arthur made no motion.

"Don't you hear?" asked Torrington, lazily.

"Shut up," said Arthur, in a low voice.

"It's the baker."

"Don't you want any bread?"

"I don't want his bill. I'm tired of getting it. I shan't have any money till Saturday, if I get it then."

After a few knocks the desperate baker gave it up and retired.

“I think,” said Torrington presently, “that the way editors and publishers and dealers treat us is scandalous. They are nearly all of them rich, yet they make us wait to the last moment as if ten days’ interest on ten shillings was of paramount importance to them. If I write anything I have to wait till it’s published, though it may be a year. It’s true I can ask, but the editors don’t like disturbing their accounts. They don’t worry about mine. You don’t have to linger on, at least ostensibly not, so long as I. You black and white men mostly send in your bill every month. But then how long do you wait? I once wrote a story; it was accepted by a magazine without my knowing, that is, they had printed three weekly numbers when I saw it by accident. I won’t say anything about the press errors, though they were enough to drive an author crazy, but fancy their impudence! When I wrote for the money they promised it soon. It didn’t come, and I wrote again and again

and again. I called and called once more. I got a pound on account (the full amount was twenty-five), and then after six months I threatened to sue them. They took no notice, and I did sue them. By them I mean the publishers. When the thing came on they put their manager in the box to say it was his private property. It cost me the money, for I never got it, and three pounds beside to show that they were mean scoundrels. Bah ! I wish I were a blacksmith or an organ-grinder. I don't say they are all like it, but a good many are."

He dropped his pipe, and strewed the ashes on the floor, which needed no addition of dirt, and went on, while Gaskell calmly listened.

"I knew a man who wrote a short article for a respectable enough paper. It came out, but the paltry half-sovereign due was not sent. In a week he wrote for it; the poor beggar was hard up naturally. The editor took no notice and he wrote again.

Then he got a letter calmly requesting a similar paper but one rather longer. He wrote it and it appeared ; but the cash did not. He wrote half a dozen times and at last got an answer to the effect that it should be sent soon. In ten days he wrote again, and a reply came directly saying that the editor considered it disagreeable for him to dun for so trifling a sum. But mark this, the money was not sent in that letter. It took another letter or even two, if I am not mistaken, to extract that thirty shillings. And he called it trifling. Why that means twenty good dinners. I should like the editor to board with some of the gang for a week. I'll wager this tenpence he would never call thirty shillings a trifling sum again."

And Torrington blew with sympathetic wrath. After a little while, finding Arthur silent, he went off and called on Miss Mowbray, about and over whom he poured a flood of talk which nearly overwhelmed her.



“And how about the new novel?” she asked, when he gave her a chance.

“It stands as it did. I have done nothing to it since I saw you.”

“I mean the one you are living, not the one you are writing.”

He grew very serious, but finally shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

“Well, I acknowledge there is one.”

“Interesting?”

“To me, yes; and to some others I know.”

“And are you the villain, Mr. Torrington?”

“I have my doubts about it. At present my character is not fully developed, I believe. I have a tendency towards villainy, no doubt. I shall see.”

He spoke perfectly seriously, and though his face was not without a smile Miss Mowbray saw he meant what he said.

“Then are you the hero?”

“By no means, as I take it; though I am to myself the chief character.”

“There is a heroine?”

“Doubtless,” he replied drily, and by suggesting politics, which she knew he abhorred, it was evident he was disinclined to say more about the feminine element of his romance.

“You are an erratic individual, I know,” said she, *apropos* of nothing to all appearance.

“I have heard so, and to show it I am going.”

“You are vain, too. You want to leave the room epigrammatically if you can, Mr. Torrington.”

He laughed and took his hat.

“The great art of conversation is to end it.”

“But surely the point of it should not be a sting in its tail. You seem glad to go.”

“Thank you for the compliment. It pleases me that you are sorry. If I stay, the joy at my departure might be at your

side. But"—and he suddenly became serious—"the truth is, my dear Miss Mowbray, that I am too restless to remain half an hour anywhere. I wander to and fro like an evil spirit."

"I thought you must be the villain," interjected his hostess. He bowed and waved his hand.

"Good-bye then." And he went away, being suddenly disconsolate when he reached the street. The difference between Torrington with others and Torrington by himself was very great. Miss Mowbray, for her part, sat down quietly and laughed, for he was always amusing to her unless he came in a great state of misery and talked utter desperation for an hour or two at a time. Then she felt as Gaskell once did when he remarked to Torrington that for a man who was not very cheerful himself an hour of his company was often provocative of instant suicide. At such times he seemed to carry on a propaganda of pessimism, and became

a messiah of misery. Shorn of his individual extravagances, he was a type which is not uncommon and almost as commonly boring. West told him so once, and the remark was taken so meekly that the sculptor repented. It had a good effect, nevertheless.

To follow all his peregrinations that day would lead through half a dozen studios. He gave Raeburn and Wynne the benefit of his tongue and advised them magisterially in their art. He drank whisky-and-soda at Monk's, and meeting there a clever but unstable artist named Vine he gave him a lecture on his folly. Vine, who put the great John's (for he always called him so) frankness down to the whisky, smiled in a superior way until accused of imitation, and then grew irritated. After that Torrington went to the National Gallery, the British Museum Library, and to a *café* where he spent sixpence out of Gaskell's tenpence in a cup of coffee. By the time he came out

it was getting late and he started home. He was accosted by a showily-dressed young woman at the top of Tottenham Court Road. He shook his head impatiently on being asked for a cab fare.

“Do you think I should walk on a night like this if I had money?” he asked, almost angrily, for it was raining hard. In the end he surrendered twopence out of his remaining fourpence, and the recipient of his bounty climbed on a tram. By the time he reached home he was wet through.

By way of a consolation he found a cheque waiting for him, which was payment for a long article in a sporting magazine. He fingered it reflectively and made a cynical remark.

“If it were not for paying my debts I should have very nearly enough money to live on. No form of expenditure that I ever heard of is so extravagant as collecting tradesmen’s autographs.”

But then his collection was not large.

Throwing the cheque on his table he lighted the fire, changed his clothes, and sat down to work or to attempt it. Soon after half-past ten he heard a double knock at the front door, and thinking it most likely one of his own friends he ran down to answer it himself. Armour was standing on the doorstep.

## CHAPTER IX.

### WHY TORRINGTON WENT OUT FOR A WALK.

THE remainder of the day in which he had spoken to Mary Morris in West's studio was a period of suffering to Armour, which had hitherto been unequalled in his life. If it had simply been dull level despair he could have borne it better ; he would indeed have braced himself for the strain, knowing that a time would come when his grief would grow bearable and even beautiful. But his old anguish of doubt was now embittered by fiery darts of self-reproach ; he blamed his own weakness and questioned his own motives. The reasoning which had convinced him appeared illogical, it was vitiated from the beginning by the inevitable fallacy of self. He acknowledged

he had done wrong. And then from being pale he flushed strongly; the magic of Mary appeared to him suddenly, and the vision was so bright that all the world lay blinded in the excess of her radiance. Yes, he said, he would win her now, he was sure at least of her love.

Hour after hour of that long day the hot fit was succeeded by a cold one, he was alternately exalted to heaven and plunged into the deepest depths, he grew weak with emotion so unusual to him. As the result of this physical side he was more and more depressed, his times of exaltation grew rarer, and Torrington's reproaches, which he bitterly imagined, grew louder and louder in his ears. More than once he rose, meaning to go and see him, to tell him all that had happened, and then he almost feared to do it. It was not that he lacked the courage to face any one, he was afraid to think how it would affect him. He believed that to all the inevitable misery



of the circumstances he had now added another. And yet it would certainly bring on a crisis. He began to see that Christmas was an impossible distance away. The matter would be settled before then. In his despair he would have been almost glad to know it was ended even though the victory did not lie with him. At last he left the studio and walked through the rain to Torrington's lodgings.

As soon as he got into the street the motion restored his flagging powers, the wind and rain were grateful to him by their taking him a little out of himself, and he began to think again that he had done nothing very wrong. His reasoning of the morning was not so bad after all. But it must be acknowledged that he could have wished to be spared the ordeal of telling Torrington. He wished he had written, and would have yielded to his wish even now had it not seemed cowardly to shirk in any way the consequences of his own acts.

He forced himself to knock at the door, knowing by the light in the room above that he would be received if no one else was there but John.

When Torrington opened the door and saw Armour he staggered and fell against the wall. A wild flood of all possible surmises rushed through his brain, and for a moment he was overcome.

“Are—are you alone?” said Armour hoarsely and with a trembling voice, feeling as he did so that if he were not and if Mary were there, after what he had said, it was all over with him.

“All right,” said Torrington, “come in. What is it?”

Armour shook the rain from his mackintosh and moistened his lips. He felt it was impossible to begin at once on what he had to say, since he saw that the man in front of him was terribly moved. He was as white as a sheet, and the hand he offered was shaking violently.

“I thought I would come round and speak to you about that article,” he said.

Torrington’s heart beat freely for a moment, and then he clenched his teeth again. It was, he knew, an impossible thing for Armour to come there at that time of night, seeing it was his first visit, if there were nothing more serious to speak about than a paltry piece of criticism. He turned and led the way upstairs quickly, indeed he ran up, for remembering that Priscilla’s portrait was on the table he feared it would pain Armour to see it. He covered it with a bundle of papers, one of which was the poem he had written to her, and carried the lamp out to light up his visitor.

When Paul entered the room he was subtly pleased with its appearance and atmosphere. It was the dwelling-place of no fool; poor as it might be, there were evidences of taste and work about it. The table was as characteristic in its way as his own.

He sat down by the fire in the first chair he saw, and Torrington knelt on the hearth-rug, nervously stirring the blazing coals. For a moment there was silence between these two men.

“So you come about that article,” said Torrington at length, in a voice which was rather hollow and sufficiently lacking in conviction to sound satirical in Armour’s ears. “I am working on it now, at least I am trying to.”

“I thought I would look round,” said Armour painfully, “though it was so late——”

“You need not trouble about that,” interrupted John; “I don’t go to bed till morning in the autumn.”

“And see if you required any hints. I might tell you something useful to you, about etching for instance.”

“Naturally you can,” replied the other, carrying on this indifferent talk for very fear of what was coming, and trying to

delude himself into the belief that this was all. "I shall be glad of some professional touches about etching, if I can work them in."

Armour nodded.

"Is the MS. getting on?"

"It is no more than notes. I am in no mood to write. I don't feel as if I should ever write again somehow. But then I am a fool, I know."

Armour did not answer, and the silence which followed was painful. Torrington broke it again. He turned resolutely to his visitor.

"Is this all you came about, Armour?"

He stared at him fixedly, with a pained expectant fear in his darkly circled eyes.

"No, it is not," was the answer.

"Then it is something about her?"

Paul nodded.

"What is it then?" cried Torrington.

"Out with it. Don't you see you are torturing me?"

Armour could see it only too plainly, for the veins stood out on his forehead, his eyes were wide open, and he bit his lips hard.

“I saw her to-day,” began Armour painfully, and Torrington still knelt, “and I thought I ought to tell you——”

“Tell me what?” burst in the other convulsedly. “Is it—is it all over with me?”

Armour shook his head hastily.

“No, no, but you see, Torrington, I couldn’t bear it. It seemed as if my saying she was not to come to see me was telling her that I didn’t love her. And so——”

“You told her!” cried Torrington fiercely and with a touch of contempt, which in colder blood he would have known was unjust, seeing that he had esteemed their compact almost superhuman abnegation on the other’s part.

“Yes, I saw her in West’s studio and ——” He looked at Torrington, who was ghastly

white and trying to speak. Before he could utter a word Paul, who was terrified at the man's emotion, cried, "Did I do wrong?"

"By G——, Armour, you did wrong," Torrington gasped, and sat down on the floor, on which he had been kneeling.

He rose in a moment and walked a step to the table. Armour looked dreadfully crestfallen; this confirmation of his own thoughts was bitter though expected. And the sight of Torrington's face was not pleasant, though there was no fierce anger in it, no slightest suggestion of violence. He leant on the table, which creaked, and stared, trying to speak. In spite of Paul's own suffering he saw a greater than his own, and knew that it was so.

"Tell me about it," commanded Torrington at length, and Armour recapitulated all that had occurred.

"And believe me, Torrington, I don't believe there is any need for you to think what you do. If you had seen how she

looked when I spoke your name you would have thought, as I do, that she loved you.”

“It’s no use saying that,” cried John. “I know better. It is all over, I know. I—why, what chance have I had at all? I don’t want to blame you. I don’t, I know, damnably strange as it seems to me, for I ought to hate you. I like you so well that I can’t do it, but I don’t think this was right, I don’t, I don’t.”

Armour sat still and looked utterly wretched. He tried to speak.

“No, you didn’t do right.” He waved his hand and Armour was silent. Torrington gulped down a sob and turned to him. “No, but, Armour, I forgive you even if I lose her, as I know I shall.”

He was sincere, though it was an awful struggle to say so much. And Armour saw it.

“Don’t, don’t, Torrington. Oh! this is a wretched business. I don’t know what to



say. But you really are too cast down. If———”

“Stop,” cried John hoarsely, “it’s all very well for you to try and console me in this way. You can’t be sincere. And I know too well.”

“I am sincere, I am,” groaned Paul, who certainly believed he was.

Perhaps he thought that such a passion as he saw now could not but win her even against his own.

“Then I couldn’t be,” said Torrington. “But all the same I forgive you for this, Paul Armour, and I will shake hands.”

Paul held his out almost in doubt, but it was taken convulsively. It was strange to see two such men in such circumstances shake hands. They seemed to measure and estimate each other. Torrington had never thought evil of Armour and had ever believed in him, but Armour saw suddenly a soul which had long been concealed from him. And what he thought the reader will

know. He made a move as if he would go away, but Torrington restrained him.

“Don’t go yet. I don’t want to be left alone. I might cut my throat.”

“Don’t, Torrington, don’t talk so.”

John sat down by the fire, and taking up the poker again stabbed at the fire convulsively. He gasped a little, and the veins and muscles on his hands stood out hard and strong.

“It’s all very well for you to speak so,” he cried, and the inevitable end of so terrible an emotion forced the tears from his eyes. They ran down unregarded. He was not ashamed of them.

“What kind of a life have you had, Armour? Tell me, did you have a happy childhood?”

“I did,” and Paul thought of the old cottage and saw his mother and sisters.

“Yes, I knew that. I could see it in you. And you have a religion. Well, I have none, and my childhood was a purgatory to me.

I would not live it again for a kingdom or the universe. And I have suffered and toiled and starved, and been in every way wretched, in ways you know nothing of. And I have been evil, as evil as a man could be. Now I saw a chance of salvation and I fear it is gone. She lifted me out of the depths of degradation. Since I have known her I have been another man. I never knew, I never suspected I could be so good, so pure, so reverent. And it is all over—I feel it. I am sure she loves you. She must, she must. By heavens, she ought to! You are a better man than I am. But it is hard, it is hard.”

The tears rolled unchecked down his face, his chest heaved, and he still monotonously stabbed the fire until the blazing coals fell out on the hearth as if he were trying to destroy an emblem of his own consuming passion.

Armour sat unable to stir. The spectacle was strange and dreadful to him, he had

never beheld any one so moved; he had believed such passion an impossible, an incredible thing. He thought he was cold himself, very marble to blazing lava, rain water to hot salt tears. He feared for this man's reason, he feared for his very life; he was fascinated and awestruck, possessed by the sight. He did not know what to do.

Presently Torrington rose and tried to regain his composure. He even smiled, but his smile was more painful than any gesture of despair. He laid his hand on a pile of manuscript.

“ Armour, once you despised me, I know. You don't do it now, I know that, but once you did. You are a strong man, but you cannot estimate me. If you could read this you would know me better, you would see it is possible for a man to act evilly against all his better part. I know a man, you know him too, who says he can't understand or reconcile what I say and what

I write. Perhaps you will be able to after this."

He put his hands on the table again and bore heavily on it. Armour rose.

"You will go?"

"I think so, it is very late."

He took his hat and coat and held out his hand once more. Torrington laughed harshly.

"Do you think I can stay in now? What do you think I am made of? You don't know me yet. I will come with you."

"It is raining hard."

"So much the better. Wait, man, wait till I put my boots on."

Armour stayed, almost dazed and horror-struck by the man's vehemence. In a moment Torrington was ready; he took his umbrella, which he did not open in the street, and walked to Maiden Lane. There he stopped, and Armour urged him to go home.

“No,” he said, “I must tire myself. Good night!”

“Where are you going?”

“God knows,” he answered bitterly, and strode into the darkness.

## CHAPTER X.

### VISIONS BY NIGHT.

No one but a fantastical self-analyst such as Torrington was would have asked himself, even vaguely, whether he preferred a wretched night to walk in to one which was fine, since he himself was wretched. It is the natural instinct of a misery which does not exhaust itself in bewailing or fly at once to the very last means of immediate extrication, to use bodily fatigue for dulling mental anguish, but few of those who do so know why. Fewer still are conscious that an increased difficulty in mere locomotion should be an extra aid to recover their objectivity. They feel it is so, and that is all.

Torrington on the other hand was well aware in his under-current of consciousness that the rain in his face, the slippery condition of the streets, his scantiness of clothing (for he had on only a very light overcoat) were all doing their best to help him recover his self-command. Yet in spite of this knowledge his mind was in a state of chaos; he took no notice of the way nor of its condition; he walked blindly, and the rain that beat on his cheeks could not cool the fierce fever of his blood. His thoughts were disconnected; at one moment he believed he was dreaming, at the next he felt that strain of mind which comes of protracted insomnia. What he saw made no impression upon him; the dull streets and dismal ways he passed through before he reached New Oxford Street were only a dim and miserable phantasmagoria to him; he was begged of more than once without the words making him think what they meant; he even ran against a drunkard and was



sworn at in a gross and insulting way without taking the slightest notice. His face was white, and still almost as livid as when Armour told him his errand. His thoughts were not really thoughts at all, they were of the nature of fleeting visions which were opposite and contradictory, thrown against the dark curtain of the London night.

He saw Priscilla sitting in her room burning his letters sorrowfully, but with the decision of Fate. Her face was pallid but beautiful, with a new hope in every lovely curve. He was glad she was sorrowful. And then his letters were again in her hand; she read them and even kissed the pages, which could have seemed no more earnest had they been written in the same fire which came dreadfully and burnt the vision from his brain. For he saw Armour with his bride—he gravely exultant, she modest as a flower of the virgin forest discovered for her finder's name. He groaned with anguish, for he deemed his was the

right; they had passed her by, he had sung her praises when he saw her first—they had let the winds blow keenly about her which he cursed. Surely she was his if she were any one's.

He had no need now of making misery for himself; the chances, even if they were equal, seemed as terrible to him as if his own life hung in the balance. He said let that go too if she went.

He had been walking an hour when he found himself close to Fenchurch Street. For the first time in that hour he came to himself, and wondered where he was. Years had passed by since he was in that part of the City, yet he recognised the place and stood bitterly wondering. For it seemed to him that he had only parted with Armour some ten minutes, and yet he must have walked nearly five miles. He could not have been less ignorant of the way he had come if some spirit had set him there as swiftly as a genius in an Arabian tale. He did not yet feel tired, but turned because the rain

stung his face with the rising of the wind that he could just now take notice of. He walked on as hard as before.

He did not think of Armour. He had forgiven him in sincerity, though he hardly knew to what extent he had been influenced to pardon him by the knowledge of his own wrong-doing in concealing his belief about Priscilla's affection for Paul. Perhaps if he had felt himself free from any blame he would have been harder. It would be unjust to say he had calculated that any anger on his part might exasperate Armour to further steps, yet as he walked and grew more calm he saw that he had probably acted as wisely on his honest impulse as if he had had time to reflect and plan. Gradually he took a wider view of the situation as his bodily energies began to flag.

If Priscilla really loved Armour it was now vain for him to proceed further. It was not only vain, it would be wrong and cruel. If her affection for him were but

slight, if she in any degree wavered between them, he had as much chance as ever. He determined as soon as possible to discover her mind, even if he had to speak to her quite openly and ask leading questions. If it were not Paul she loved he would be easy enough. It was hardly likely her love was returned. But he was convinced it was not so. Paul must be the man.

He had said it would be wrong and cruel to go further if the girl really loved Armour. He proceeded to plead against his own decision. Was it not a question as to which loved her most? If he believed his passion was the greater, would he not be justified in prosecuting his suit? It seemed a question of casuistry. He had to estimate Armour's and his own love, and naturally enough he decided that his was the more passionate of the two. He believed indeed Armour loved, but that he did not know what real passion meant. There was a difference.

But then from that dreadful scene in the street it was evident that Priscilla must surely love with all or almost all her heart. He choked a little about this, but assured himself that he could make her forget anything. He believed that passion like his own would beget a passion too. And yet—and yet!

So he argued it all over again from the other side, proving that he was a scoundrel and ought to be whipped. Then he defended himself angrily and accused everybody else. He grew weary and began to drag his feet. He was wet through to the skin and yet his lips were cracking with fever. At the Euston Road a wretched-looking woman stared at him when the light fell on his face from the corner gas lamp.

“Why don’t you put your umbrella up, you fool?” she asked hoarsely, probably believing he was mad.

He received the suggestion in the manner of a mesmeric patient and opened it at once,

as if it were an imperative order from an authority. He went on blindly, wondering what he had been thinking about, for he was very tired. Gradually the dividing trouble seemed to leave him; he did not argue, he hardly cared. Let things go as they would. He wished he was at home, for it was very uncomfortable being wet through. He walked now at the rate of two miles an hour, toiling so hard that the last hundred yards seemed a great distance. He climbed his stairs wearily, and on entering his room dropped his umbrella on the floor, where it remained. He threw his overcoat on it and all his clothes followed. He fell into bed rather than lay down, and a troubled sleep followed for an hour or more.

How had Armour spent the night? It is worth while seeing.

Torrington had been troubled for himself; in his selfish egoism Armour had been but little regarded; yet this man, strangely moved as he was from the sweet even

tenor of his life, thought more of his rival's grief than of his own doubt and anguish. It seemed to him that he had never seen such pain as that on Torrington's white and haggard face, which was a ready index to his soul. He feared for him so that he had doubts as to having done right in letting him go without further speech. If he looked so now what would he be like if the worst came to him? He too had his vision, and in it he saw blood on the white robe of his love, and blood on his own innocent hands. It was possible, it was quite possible. The man's face haunted him; he saw it convulsed and livid, the tears running down the cheeks unchecked, the white lips, and the loose hair which fell darkly over the wrinkled brow. He might behold it pale and very quiet, unmoved for evermore by any passion, still though the world were troubled, silent though the heavens spoke. It was a horrible thing to gain happiness thus. Would it be happiness,



would not a ghost enter his very bridal chamber and follow him day by day? For he fancied that Torrington's brain would surely go. He had had his opinion concerning its steady balance even before this; a man cannot be eccentric and wild of speech among the steadier of his kind, without some touch of insanity being called in to explain such variations from the normal standard of behaviour; and though he did not in any sense believe Torrington mad, he was certainly inclined to think his peculiarities were not those of a well-regulated mind.

Then he had thought evil of John Torrington. If he had done so it was not without cause. Now this man had, in the very exaltation of anguish, forgiven what he had done, forgiven it freely. He was able to put himself in Torrington's place, and he did not believe he could have forgiven had he thought, as Torrington did, that he had acted wrongly.



It was surely something to do, something which not every man would have done, and in Armour's opinion it betokened a nobility of mind which he could not equal. He felt a little humbled by it, just as he had been awestruck by the sight of the man's passion.

"I will never judge so hastily again," he said, "never."

Whatever latent nobility there might have been in Torrington, it is evident he had none of the great strength of renunciation. He had said he could not in any case congratulate Armour; he acknowledged his own weakness. Armour was made of very different stuff; he was calm and strong. Like a mountain, though storms raged about him, his stability remained, he was rooted deep in the foundations of the world. It was not his to be Aetnean, volcanic, fierce with flame and scarred with lava; he stood in a temperate latitude, he heard thunder and might be shaken, but he caused no

earthquake, and was not crowned with fire and snow. He inherited his gifts and had grown quietly to his altitude; he was still growing. He did not clothe himself in smoke and ashes; he was ever benign, and in winter there was shelter on his slopes; it was not dangerous to be near him, no human cities or god-like temples were ever desolated by his anger or despair.

Unto all men who are not wholly base come certain hours when they lay aside their lower selves, and behold the good triumphant over evil cast down for the time. These precious minutes must be solitary; a single voice would make the naked soul fly to the shelter of its outward humanity, another eye would violate its chastity. This is the hour of accepted penitence, of fervent prayer, of renunciation; it is the privilege of the mystic, theurgic or pathetic, it is the right of the gods and a great gift to man. They are blessed who know it.

Paul Armour walked to and fro, and such

a great hour began to dawn for him. Slowly the lines smoothed themselves from his forehead, his hands unclenched, the painful throbbing of his blood was heard no longer thundering in his ears, his breathing became easier, and his chest expanded. Surely one might have said, "God is with this man. Some such expression might a martyr wear; it would not shame those who stand by the throne." He became transfigured, a certain tranquil joy overspread his countenance, a glow extended to his finger tips, he felt well and at peace with all men. In such a mood a man might die. For death is but the renunciation of Life, and he was ready now to renounce Love.

Yes, it was well to give her up to a man who loved her so and with such a great passion, for it would make all things smooth. Let her marry Torrington. Then John would believe his sincerity, they would be equal at last.

Yet a tear rolled down his cheek.

A strangely beautiful thought came to him and made him flush with a curious painful joy, for he felt highly privileged that he should think it. It would be a great sad pleasure to him when she was married. He would use his art for a consolation, and then bid good-bye to the past, going straight forward on his solitary life journey.

He beheld himself in his studio, which was bright and speckless, without dust or disorder, made ready for the function of the artist, prepared for the bridal of the hand and soul at the hands of faithful memory. He was dressed in clean working clothes, on his table lay his tools ready, the screen was rightly placed to break the pleasant glow of sunlight, and the acid baths were filled with unused colourless acid. On the table lay a bright and virgin plate gleaming like gold, polished and fair, ready for the loving work of a lover who should thereon etch the wonderful face and tresses he had loved so well. Slowly and surely he beheld her grow

there as day by day he worked at no other labour, neither soiling his hands nor his heart with anything alien or evil. This was the sacrament and seal of renunciation. The work was done, aye, and done as no other in this world could do it--perfect both in the beauty of that divine lost face, perfect with workmanship which was Love's. Aye, done. Nay, not wholly. Love, take thy graver and write in the background, here where the acid has blurred and bitten it, here in the shadow under her hair, so faintly that none may see them save by chance or careful search, these words :

"He who did this loved her greatly, and now he puts it forth without any name, neither his nor hers."

Surely this man was of no common order, let him comment who will.

It was long past midnight, hours past, when Armour sat down at his table and wrote two letters. He placed one inside the other, and sealing it deliberately without any haste or pause he went out and posted

it, walking calmly through the rain, which touched him graciously. For the wind had fallen and the air was mild.

But Torrington was struggling with fierce dreams, and woke parched like a spirit in hell, to sleep no more that night.

## CHAPTER XI.

### LETTERS AND MOTIVES.

FOR the first time for at least two months Torrington rose early to escape from the torture of his thoughts as he lay turning on his fevered bed. Staring in the glass he wondered at the alteration in himself even after days of suspense, each of which had left a mark that might not be altogether temporary. He seemed worn out, his eyes were hollow and dark, his lips white and cracked, his cheeks yellow and sunken. He was like a man who will in a few hours be raving in the delirium of a marsh fever which has been long undermining the body, and will at last suddenly take even the brain by assault. This could not last

long; he knew it, the end must come. His landlady said so to herself, for, though she had nothing to go by but her own skill in guessing, during the last week she had known that some woman was at the bottom of the great change she saw in her lodger.

By eight o'clock he was in the street, which was covered with mud and slush. A bitter wind was again blowing, the sky overhead had no break. He turned towards Priscilla's house and waited to see her. To have been without sight of her for two days was to have been divided by an eternity. He determined to wait till she came out and speak at once. He overrated his strength, and when at nine he saw her hurriedly leave the house and walk hastily away, for a moment he felt too weak even to follow her.

"Priscilla," he said gently, when he came near, and she started and stopped. She looked at him fearingly, his face shocked



her. "I would like to speak to you. Are you in a hurry?"

She trembled and looked at him in a strange way.

"Yes, Mr. Torrington. I have an engagement for half-past nine and shall be late."

"Then let us walk on. This way? Yes." He relapsed into silence but looked at her in a heartrending manner. He could see how moved she was.

"Where are you going, dear?"

"To the Berwick Studios to sit for Miss Vane. She has a class. And she will scold me, I know, for being late. She is very strict."

She spoke nervously. He saw it, and was afraid to broach what he had to say. Why not wait a little, perhaps it would be better. At least he could hope.

"May I come and meet you when you leave? When do you leave?"

"At one. Yes, Mr. Torrington, if you like."

'They reached the main street and a 'bus came along.

"I must take this 'bus," she said, almost piteously, with an accent he could not understand.

He nodded.

"Then I shall see you at one."

He reached home again by ten, and paced his room like a caged animal; his head was in confusion, his thoughts led nowhere. He looked at his papers with a strange expression, and taking up a pile of manuscript weighed it in his hand, dropping it at last with an almost contemptuous laugh. No words could have spoken plainer his objective knowledge of his subjective weakness and folly. He sat down and rested his head on his hands, but that attitude grew painful. He threw himself finally on his bed and slept for a little while. By the eleven o'clock post came a letter for him, and his landlady brought it up. Not knowing that he had been out she deemed him asleep as

usual. He rose and took it from her, stared at but did not recognise the handwriting. He was half inclined to throw it down unread as something which could not concern him. He walked wearily to his chair, sat down, and opened it. Another folded envelope dropped out; he stooped down and saw "Miss Mary Morris" written on it. He did not start, but stared at it without a motion. His first thought was that it was a letter of his returned. But the writing was not his, moreover the street address was not given. He turned it over painfully, and at last opened the letter in which it had come. It was written in pencil, without date, but the initials were P. A. He tried to read it, but failed, for his hand shook so. Finally he laid it flat on the table. It ran thus:

"DEAR TORRINGTON,

"I cannot go to sleep. You are nobler than I, for I think that what I did to-day

was just, but not noble. If I had been as you and thought it wrong I do not think I could have forgiven. I think your grief would be terrible, while mine would be quiet and sad, and thoughts of you would very nearly kill what happiness I gained. So I do all I can think to do for you—the enclosed letter. Send it to her if you judge well. I should have sent it direct only it occurred to me that she might see more reason to like me just for doing this. Therefore you must use your own judgment. You cannot call this insincere, as you did when I tried to cheer you. Are we not quits now? I could not have done this yesterday, but I do it without an effort now, and will stick to it unflinchingly whatever pain may come to me.

“Send me one word to say if you have used it, and then for heaven’s sake let it drop.

“P. A.”

Torrington read these words with his eyes wide open as though he beheld some strange and dreadful sight which was so strange as to be incredible. He wiped his eyes as if to clear his vision, and read it again. Then the hot tears fell suddenly on the white sheet of paper. Such abnegation struck him hard; he winced at his own selfishness, but nevertheless made up his mind to take what advantage he could of this offer. He felt like a reprieved man. But what was in the letter addressed to her?

“DEAR MISS MORRIS,

“Since I spoke to you I have seen Mr. Torrington, and have thought over what I said to you. In any case I want you to believe I was sincere in it. It rests now with you.

“But I do not know what to do. Torrington’s grief at the thought of losing you filled me with awe. It was very terrible, and I almost fear for him. You once said

you would always believe what I said. Believe me now when I say that his love for you is true and deep. I once did him wrong. I do what I can to atone for it. I believe it will be best for you to marry him. Believe me when I say this in all, in the deepest sincerity.

“Yours,

“PAUL ARMOUR.”

The letter dropped from Torrington's hand. Incredible as the other seemed, this was more wonderful still. He could not understand it. He rose from his seat, without picking up the piece of paper, and leant against the wall. What did it mean—what could it mean? he asked in bewilderment. He bathed his head with cold water, and tried to think.

For some minutes all thought was impossible. He had again and again to look at both letters to convince himself that this was not a delusion. He even examined the

texture of the paper, and rubbed it between his fingers almost idly. He smiled at last very curiously, and choked a little. He sat with his head in his hands for a long while.

To give up a girl one really loved ! It was then possible. He could believe in the renunciation of wealth, of power, of fame, but not of love. Any other conceivable conquest of self was comparatively easy, but to say to the purple sea of passion, "Thus far shalt thou go," was superhuman and godlike. And Armour said he was the more noble. He almost spat on the floor in disgust at himself, he seemed small and ridiculous with his emotion beside this man, who stood calmly to bear his pain for fear another, and that other his rival, should suffer more.

It is not unnatural that a man like Torrington, who was for ever accustomed to doubt and analyse his own motives, should turn curiously, even in that stunned condition, to see if there were no common-

place explanation of this self-sacrifice. Let him imagine, even though it cost an effort, that Armour was not the man he took him for, but a deep schemer. Might this not be a method of speaking to the girl, after debarring himself from ordinary speech. He doubtless knew Mary Morris better than John, and might have calculated the effect of his letter. But, no, such a supposition was impossible. A man who could do that would never have made their compact, if he had broken it he never would have mentioned the fact, to say nothing about his general character, which forbade any one with penetration to credit him with an evil motive. Torrington dismissed an hypothesis which he never seriously entertained and discussed another.

What was Paul Armour's notion of love, what was his power of passion? From Torrington's own furious emotion he naturally judged the other, if not cold, at least lacking in great fire. He himself could



not, loving the girl, give her up. It appeared Armour could. Therefore he did not love her as he did. But she was worthy of being loved to the utmost. That was certain. Then he was the worthier lover.

Taking it for granted the letter would give Priscilla to him, he proved thus to his own satisfaction that he could accept the sacrifice. But there was a sting remaining yet, since Armour called him noble for a forgiveness which after all was only an act of repentance. He saw well enough how he could have acted nobly. He might have gone to Armour saying he believed he was the favoured one, and if it had turned out so he would have been the immediate means of making two happy. And himself miserable. It was an awkward thing that nobility seemed close akin to sorrow. He could do that even now. But he shook his head, saying that what Armour thought love was only affection—mere custom and habit. He would perhaps be giving her up

to a man who did not know what love really was. She deserved better, and naturally better was Torrington. So he proceeded to minimise the sacrifice, not with any intention of lessening the obligation, but to persuade himself it was one he could accept.

During all this analysis of himself and Armour there was in a deep undercurrent of consciousness the bitter knowledge that he was playing the sophist, and deluding himself as to Armour's feelings. Every look and word written or spoken by the man betokened a deep and strong affection, of which any woman might be proud, and he did not care to see how greatly passion partakes of selfishness, how, in glorifying it, he played the egoist again and worshipped his own desire.

Presently he left abstract discussion of motives. For having come to the conclusion to win her if he could by fair means (he had not yet thought of foul), it was

idle, since time was short, to waste a moment in excusing to himself his taking the path he had selected. What would be the effect on Priscilla if he did give her Armour's letter? Surely for an analyst here was an opportunity.

It was a curious question. Armour's letter could be read to mean that he acknowledged the other man's love was the greater. Some women might even take it as an insult. But Mary Morris would know better than that—her knowledge of Paul was not insignificant. If she loved him greatly, and put that construction on it, it might wound her so much that she would do what he said. If she were subtle she would read it differently. Suppose she had only a little affection for him, it might kill it; certainly in that case she was not likely to analyse. The whole thing depended on her character, and how well did Torrington know it?

The number of cases to analyse was too

much for him in his state of mind. It would have required a man with all his wits about him, not one who was worn with passion, insomnia, and suspense till he feared for his own reason. But it was growing late ; he put on his hat and walked towards the Berwick Studios, trying to come to a decision on the way. Suddenly he stopped, flushed ruddy red, and then went as pale as death. He staggered against the railings of a house, and on recovering from his dizziness he pulled out Armour's letter and looked at it eagerly. He read it through again and again, and began to dally with temptation. His colour came and went, and came again. Surely, he said, Armour had put a weapon in his hand which might destroy himself. The letter he looked at was not the one addressed to Mary Morris, but the other, and as he read it he left out some paragraphs, and made one little alteration. He read straight on until he came to " So I do all I can think

to do for you," and then he substituted mentally for "the enclosed letter," "show her this letter." All that followed down to "judgment" he omitted, and then read on to "whatever pain may come on me." The last paragraph he omitted.

He read it thus, and it practically amounted to renouncing the girl. If he showed it, it would be necessary to scratch out a great deal, but that would hardly matter. It could have but one effect. If not.— Then he looked at the other letter. That was even easier to doctor. If the two last sentences of the first paragraph were cut it was a corroboration of the other, which would be irresistible. Even if she loved him greatly, her pride would not allow her to show it after this. Torrington put both back into his pocket and walked on with his face hot.

Surely it was a generous thing to do! He said that, and bit his lip until it almost bled; but then, shameful as it might be,

it would make him secure. He stopped again and looked up into the sky, which was clearing of its clouds. Aye, it was better to look up into those blue spaces beyond than to stare into the muddy streets with a bent head. He walked on again, fierce in argument, suffering direly, contemptuous of himself, sorrowful and pained, but not yet lost to honour.

How did it stand? He could win her by what was almost forgery, though not a crime in the eyes of the law. It would be an absolute deliberate lie. If he gave her the letter it seemed that the chances were equal, and if he did not the suspense might last till Christmas. He could not bear that. At last he came to the studios without having reached a decision, though he grew more and more disinclined to commit a fraud. For he by no means blinked the truth as he thought about the matter. He threw sophistry to the winds, and the question was plainly whether he was ready

to cheat a woman of her lover and an honourable man of his wife. For now he never thought it possible that Priscilla loved any one unknown to him.

He walked to and fro more than half an hour, for he had taken much less time in reaching the street than he had reckoned on. He spent the minutes in miserable calculations. Should he or should he not? Would she do this or that? Finally he gave up thinking, and marched backwards and forwards mechanically, until three or four servant girls engaged in cleaning windows made audible remarks on his persistence. The woman in the baker's shop at the corner noticed him from his looking at her clock, and her glances annoyed him wonderfully. He wished she would mind her own business. As for the laughing girls at the window, he stared at them without knowing it with lack-lustre eyes. He leant up against a lamp-post for a while, but did not think. The horse in a butcher's cart was

close to him, so he went forward and stroked the animal's soft nose. A dog that looked at him he whistled to, and when it came up and fawned on him he patted it. It was one o'clock—five minutes past—ten minutes past—and then he saw her at last.

She came up to him rather out of breath. He looked at her fixedly, but could not discern anything in her face. He had not been able to look at her in the morning, but now he could not read her. She was exactly the same as she was before Armour had spoken to her. His heart leapt to think it was so.

"I am sorry I have kept you waiting, Mr. Torrington," she said sweetly, "and now I must run back for a minute. I only came now just to save you from thinking I was not punctual."

"I don't mind how long I wait for you," he answered, with a consciousness of the double meaning of his speech, "so long as



you do come, Priscilla. But don't be very long now."

In less than five minutes she returned, and they walked away together. The baker's wife was satisfied in her mind. It was a young woman he had been waiting for. And one in her opinion not so very good-looking either.

Torrington was seldom at a loss for words, but now he stammered like a schoolboy in a strange drawing-room; he felt awkward, though the letters in his pocket troubled him less. His confusion came from his joy. She seemed so unconscious, so much the same as she had been. He had expected that when he was with her she would be cold; he had feared so greatly lest she should abruptly say the "no" which he dreaded to hear. It seemed incredible that such a child should be able to keep her countenance if she loved Armour. He had expected to see her less worn and sad, for he was apt to think women selfish, from

self-absorption, in love matters. Probably he did her an injustice.

His talk for some hundred yards was foolish and disconnected, and would seem semi-idiotic written down, for he wandered from the weather to vague studio talk, avoiding anything which might lead to personal matters. Finally he asked where she was going that afternoon.

“To Blackfriars, to do some little business,” she replied.

“May I come with you?” he asked, and she consented willingly, though with no consoling flash of gladness.

Yet the effect was such on him that he took out her letter from his pocket and sealed it up. He was glad when he had done it, though his contentment at her attitude had been the additional weight which decided him to act rightly. That and her presence, for with her he could entertain no base thought.

As he walked on the idea that Paul had

spoken to her without any effect made him pity Armour. He began to be quite sorry for him, and at last he ventured to say what was in his mind.

“I saw Mr. Armour last night, Priscilla,” he said, and then his heart sank to see the look in her great dark eyes. She was startled when he hoped to see her indifferent. His pity for Paul soon vanished.

“Yes?”

“Yes, he came to see me.”

“I didn’t know he ever came to your place, Mr. Torrington.”

“It was the first time. And, Priscilla, he told me he had—spoken to you.”

She did not turn towards him, but looked straight ahead.

“He told me what he said,” added Torrington in a burst, “and I was very troubled about it. I walked all last night in the rain. And this morning he wrote to me. And in his letter there was one for you.”

She turned now. When she spoke her voice shook.

“ One for me, Mr. Torrington ? ”

“ Yes, I will give it you directly. You will see what he says. I think it is better you should have it, though he left it to me whether I should let you see it or not. It is better to end this suspense.”

They walked on and did not speak ; the girl because she could not, Torrington because he hardly dared. When they came to her house he drew out the letter.

“ I will give you this now. But as to going to Blackfriars. You have had no dinner yet. Will you come round to Mrs. Mason’s and have some with me ? ”

“ I must go in first, Mr. Torrington.”

“ But you will come ? ”

“ I will come.”

He put the letter into her hand and walked away hastily lest his courage should fail him before her. It was a hard thing to do, and yet he had hope still. He went

round to Mrs. Mason's and found her there with Milly. He grew excited and talked hard to both of them until they screamed with delight. He was so amusing, and made so many jokes. Mrs. Mason almost cried, and as for Milly, she called him a dear. He asked for dinner and sat down to it. He ate nothing, and ordered some ale.

Presently he grew very quiet, and the women left him alone. He tried to read the paper and could not. Instead, he went through Armour's letter again. Priscilla had read hers by this, while he was laughing, nay, before he had reached the restaurant. How did she take it? It was no wonder he could not eat. But she had promised to come. Yes, she had promised, and without pressing. But she was late! How slowly the time went. She was late.

He moved about the room impatiently. Suddenly he looked up and saw a girl in

the shop he thought he knew. Yes, it was Alice, Priscilla's sister. He sat down as if he had been thrust into the chair, and rose again instantly. She was coming in and was speaking to him. He bent towards her anxiously. What was the girl saying? What? Say it again. Only a common ordinary message after all.

"My sister says some one has come in and she cannot go out this afternoon."

"Yes, yes."

"And she will write, Mr. Torrington."

He stared at the girl dreadfully until she shrank back.

"My God! girl, what is she going to say?"

"I don't know, Mr. Torrington."

And with that she withdrew.

He stood looking after her, so absorbed in the conflict of his passions and fears that he did not notice the curiosity with which Mrs. Mason and Mrs. Wharton regarded him.

“Who’s that girl?” said the elder woman, whispering.

“Don’t you know? It’s Miss Morris’s sister.”

“Why does she come here to speak to Mr. Torrington? Look at him. What’s the matter I wonder.”

Mrs. Wharton looked a little troubled herself, and turning away said in a low tone:

“It’s easy enough to guess, I think.”

Torrington moved from his place at last, and taking up his hat and umbrella went into the shop. He threw down his money, and with a ghastly attempt to hide his emotion remarked that he had no appetite that day. The two women looked after him, and when he was gone discussed the situation.

“I know all about it,” said Mrs. Wharton, “and I don’t think much of the other man. Mr. Torrington is the one I should choose. I told her so.”

“ Yes ? ” said Mrs. Mason.

“ Do you think the other one handsome ?  
I don’t.”

“ Well, Mr. Torrington isn’t either.”

“ Is that your opinion ? ” said Milly.  
And she smiled curiously, saying no more.



## CHAPTER XII.

### WHAT WOULD SHE WRITE ?

POOR Mary Morris ! Her trials had been bitter, her struggles hard, often and often she had nearly fainted on the way which had been almost lightless and without hope. She had borne her sufferings in quietness and had been meekly gentle when her prayers remained without answer, and now at last she earned a reward, the only one truly desired by a true woman. Her affection for Armour was one of long standing, and though it had never reached the heights of passion, which few women know, it was not less strong and enduring than the purity and modesty which made her the fit companion of a man like this.

She was in her new-found happiness not unconscious of another's suffering, for she, no less than Armour, knew Torrington's passion was deep and sincere. To have failed to recognise that would have shown she was unworthy of it, and she was worthy of more, far more. She had been tortured dreadfully during the last few days, not once for the last week had she fallen asleep without weeping, and sad dreams broke and disturbed her feverish and fitful slumbers. As suspense broke down Torrington, and even made inroads on Armour's vast physical strength, it had worn her to a shadow and left her frailer than a broken reed. She was incapable of work, her nerves were shattered, her ancient sorrowful peace destroyed even before the scene in West's studio which had shaken her soul to its foundations.

But then she grew for a moment stronger. Dumb as she stood while he spoke, it had been with difficulty she refrained from shrieking; many women would have fainted

and screamed in hysteria. He loved her after all. Then she could wait through anything and for any time, nothing could shake her again. Then she thought of Torrington, and trembled.

She liked him, and always had. He had shown he liked her, and had always spoken to her very kindly, even before he began to love her. Many women liked him, those who were clever and those who were fools. Some even notoriously cold had an affection for him; and all this probably came from his disposition, which drew him to the other sex. When all his desires were gathered into one channel it was difficult for any one who did not actually dislike him to resist at least a certain influence, and the girl he named Priscilla knew that she would have ended in loving him if she had not loved Armour. It was a compliment to be loved in such a way; for the first time in her life she tasted the sweets of that power which a woman hastens to surrender, lest she should

do harm with a weapon which has no natural charm for her when love is in question. She was afraid of him as well, and thinking that men before this had killed women whom they could not gain, she gave Torrington credit for at least some of the madness of passion which leads to the commission of such a crime. She was alarmed when she considered what might happen if she said "no" to him. The thought that struck Armour struck her too, though less forcibly. Would he commit suicide?

During the whole afternoon and evening that followed Paul's avowal, she tried to nerve herself to reject Torrington; but when she at last fell asleep, it was with no assurance that she would have the strength to say the word when in his presence. Her suffering was intense. She wavered like a flame which consumes itself. A few more days of this trouble would have ended in brain fever.

Then she saw him in the morning, and

wondered whether he knew. With that skill in covering the soul which misogynists call feminine deceit, she veiled her own mind from him. He did not find her transparent then, she was opaque, and once more a mystery; his eyes could not fathom hers, his soul had lost touch with one which could never be his. She withdrew wholly from his power, and as an anemone in a pool of fresh water that will not show one slender filament, she covered herself and stood aloof. But seeing him calm she regained her courage and did not refuse to meet him at the Berwick studios. The whole time she asked herself whether he knew that Paul had spoken to her, and could not decide whether he did or not, though she inclined to the former belief.

Hence his saying so was no great shock to her. But she was troubled when he told her of the letter. She suffered incredible tortures before she was able to read it. The knowledge that this was so determined

Torrington to give it her at once, instead of waiting until they went to Blackfriars. She ran upstairs hurriedly and read it in her room alone.

When she came out her face was very pale, but the light of a purpose shone in her eyes. She called her sister and gave her the message in a manner which admitted of no questioning. When Alice returned and told her what Torrington had said, she made no comment, but sat down in silence. In less than an hour she was called, and a letter from Torrington given to her.

“MY DARLING,

“You don’t know to what you have condemned me, you cannot have thought of the torture I should suffer until I see you or hear from you. What does it mean, what are you going to write? I asked your sister that. I ask you. And answer.

“But for God’s sake answer me as I would have it. Don’t, don’t say you will

never love me. You can't tell how I love you; I can't express it, life cannot, death cannot. I can't think of life without you; what would it be? Can I live without you. I am in torture, I burn as in fire. Help me, Priscilla, and soon—don't be cruel. Ah, don't! You cannot tell what you are to me. You will never know.

“I shall not sleep to-night. Oh, be quick!”

The letter was almost illegible, the signature wholly so, and yet she read it fluently. The tears fell from her eyes, her bosom heaved painfully, her breath almost failed her. But still she did not write. She sat down and read the other letter. And still she did not write. Ah, but this is a strange and wonderful world, full of things lovely and things dreadful, of cruelty and of kindness which cannot be reconciled, and shall not be. Subtler religions there have been and are, but Manichaeus spoke one truth at least that shall still stand though it be for

ever attacked, unless we at last sorrowfully learn that there is no peace even in the end, and that Ormuzd and Ahriman are one and indivisible, the type of eternal struggle and everlasting conflict.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### GAUDEAT.

THE previous night Torrington had spent in walking, attaining at last a state of body which forbade his mind the pondering of possibilities, and now he fled to the same panacea of mental suffering. It rained even more violently than it had done then ; the streets were worse than ever, the wind blew violently in heavy gusts, the sky was low and very heavy. He left home at ten o'clock ; he had waited there till then in case the last late post might bring him the letter he feared and yet wished for, but with the final stroke of the hour he rose and went out.

Whither he went he did not know, and could never quite remember. But at a quarter to twelve he found himself again near home in a state of utter and complete exhaustion. He passed Maiden Lane and stopped, thinking of the many times he had entered it joyfully, and of that one fearful night which he had spent waiting for Priscilla when she was in Paul's studio.

He leant against the wall, and though he was wet to the very skin, though his outer coat shone and the rain ran into his boots, he was deadened to the discomfort and never noticed it. What was the good of going home?—the letter would not be there. He wondered if Paul was in. Perhaps he would know. He turned towards the studio and saw the gaslight shining through the glass above. Without considering the lateness of the hour he feared Priscilla might be there, and hardly dared to knock. At last he did so, and Armour opened the door.

“Come in,” he said gravely, and Torrington entered. The two men looked at each other silently.

“You are very wet,” said Paul, and Torrington shook his head impatiently.

“What does it matter? I thought you might be up, so I came in.”

“I have had a letter,” said Paul.

“What was in it?” cried John, catching his arm as his heart sank within him.

“What does she say?”

“Did you not get a letter?”

“No, no; what does she say? Is it all up with me?”

He spoke in a quick eager voice which was sharp and painful.

“I fear so,” said Paul, almost sorrowfully, so it seemed.

“And—and,” stammered John, “she loves you?”

“I don’t know, Torrington, but I suppose so. She tells me she has given you your answer, which is——”

“No!” said Torrington. “Ah!”

He sat down in the big leather chair and leant back quietly. But Paul hardly liked to look at him.

“This is a very hard blow,” he said at last. “It is the hardest I ever had. Yes,” After a minute he added, “Have you any water?”

When Paul brought it, he took the jug itself and drank a great draught.

“I was very thirsty,” he murmured almost apologetically, and lay back exhausted.

“Yes,” he said, with a faint smile, “I am wet. I had better go home now. Good night, Armour.”

“Oh, Torrington, I am very sorry.”

“You couldn’t help it. It had to be.”

“But it is hard, I know.”

“Yes, it is. Shake hands, Armour. Good night.”

Armour caught hold of him and stared in his face.

“You need not be afraid,” said Torrington. “Good night.”

So he went home again, like a man walking in his sleep. He did not suffer at all, he was now only very tired; he remembered he had not really slept for five nights. He wondered vaguely whether he could to-night. If he did not what would happen?

It was surely a good thing that his strength was utterly gone. He slept like a dead man for nearly twelve hours, without a dream, without a motion. It certainly was well, just as it was very well that the last blow did not come upon him without warning. Afterwards he felt glad that he had been prepared, and that hope had been taken from him gradually. At one next day he prepared his own breakfast, and by two was at Raeburn's studio, where he was expected. He had looked so ill for weeks that his appearance excited no comment; indeed, the painful look of anxiety had left him. He wondered if George knew any-

thing about the matter, and after a while asked a question.

“Have you heard any news, George?”

Raeburn looked up quickly and then turned away.

“What kind of news?”

“Something about one of you fellows.”

“Yes,” hesitated George, “Wynne told me about Armour.”

“And anything else? Yes, I see you know. Well let it be for the present. I should have told you. I want to see him now if you wouldn’t mind going over to his place and saying so.”

Raeburn nodded and went out, while John lay down on the sofa. Presently Armour and George came in, and the artist went to the other end of the room, behind a screen where he made some unnecessary noise.

Torrington did not rise, but held out his hand, which the other took very gently. He sat down, and with a thought of tenderness put his great hand on the other’s brow,

looking at him affectionately. It touched Torrington to the very heart.

“ I sent for you, Paul, because I thought I had something to say. But I fear my thoughts wander a little.” He paused. “ I wanted to tell you not to think I shall be foolish about this. I dare say it is better so, you are a better man than I.”

“ Don’t say so.”

“ Ah, you don’t know. If you did you would think the same as I do. I want her to keep anything I have given her, if you don’t mind. And, Paul, mind you are always very good to her.”

Armour looked hurt.

“ Nay, don’t take it so, but she is so very delicate and so transparent. Did you know she knew my sister? Well, she does, and Mabel said it would be only too possible for her to be very unhappy. But you will make her happy. Once I thought, aye, and said, I couldn’t congratulate you, but now I can say I hope you will be happy.”

“Thank you, Torrington.”

John held out his hand.

“I think, Armour, that many people believe me as bad as a man can be. But I think also that two know me a little better.”

Armour took his hand and pressed it.

“Yes, Torrington, yes.”

There was a moment's silence and then Armour spoke.

“That night I wrote you those letters, Torrington, a beautiful thought came to me, a very beautiful one. I never felt so in all my life.”

He told John in very simple words what he had intended doing, and how he had felt about it.

“It is natural such as he should have such thoughts,” said John to himself.

“Is there anything else, Torrington?”

“No, I think not. But, Armour, once we were acquaintances, now I hope we are



friends always, whether we see much or little of each other. Is it so?"

The strong grip of Paul's hand and his eyes answered that question, for he could not speak, even though he tried.

\* \* \* \*

That evening Priscilla went to see Paul, who greeted her gravely and reverently. She sat down in silence, and presently he played soft music to her, until in the falling darkness he heard her sob. He left the piano and knelt beside her, and took her hand in his. Her troubles were over at last, she was sheltered in a home that did not mock the name, and was blessed as much as blessing. Though she lost the name of Priscilla she kept the one of Mary.

\* \* \* \*

Is there not always a touch of comedy in all things? The day after this last scene Paul told Gaskell gravely that he was

going to be married, and Arthur thanked heaven piously, much to the lover's astonishment.

"I am glad, because you won't walk up and down your studio any more, Armour. I consider your marriage a blessing."

Arthur communicated the intelligence of the approaching wedding to Torrington, and was surprised to learn that he already knew of it. He naturally imagined that Wynne had told him, but when he asked if that were the case, Torrington replied :

"I have suspected this for some time. It is no great news, Arthur. I shall see you to-morrow."

He went away without saying more.

When he reached home he sat down to his table, and taking up the manuscript of the poem he wrote for his lost love, read it slowly. Sometimes he stopped and stared for a moment through the dull panes of his window towards the west at the setting sun, which was approaching the tiled roofs of

the opposite houses. Then he dropped his head again and read on. His lips moved as he read. At last he laid it down slowly, saying to himself, with a curious smile, that it was not so bad after all ; it could not be, seeing for whom it was written. He lifted it again, and laying within it the faded flower of a gold chrysanthemum, placed it under a pile of other manuscripts. The rosy glow from the sinking sun fell upon his face and he turned away.

Presently he took a fair sheet of paper, and sitting down wrote what follows here :—

“Hoc carmen quidam raro castus caste fudit ; at voce missa puella percara et sanctissima (nam sine spe amare idem ac mors amatae) mortua est, nec quidem inopinato quum talem alienam a sua indignitate duxerit. Quare hos versus nullo nomine subscripto in tumulto ponit, precans a deo, si vero Deus sit, ut anima sua sine dolore laetitia tandem gaudeat.”

“ He who was but seldom pure of heart wrote this poem in all purity, when suddenly the dear and holy maiden died. For to a lover the loss of the beloved is her death. Not unexpected did this come, for he knew that of her at least he was unworthy. Wherefore he now places these verses on her grave without any signature, praying to God, if indeed one looks down upon him, that her soul may know joy at last without any suffering.”

Sitting with his elbows on the table he stared again through the window, and watched the last faint rose fade from the tender sky, as it grew colourless and leaden above the way of the departed sun. The shadows fell about him slowly, and still he sat there, when suddenly the clouds parted and he beheld the lucid evening star shining very steadfastly in the heavens beyond, which were pure and utterly calm. His lips parted, moving as though he said

“Gaudeat” aloud, and then, as Hesperus sank once more from view, he lighted his lamp and turned again to the work he had so long neglected.

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THE END.

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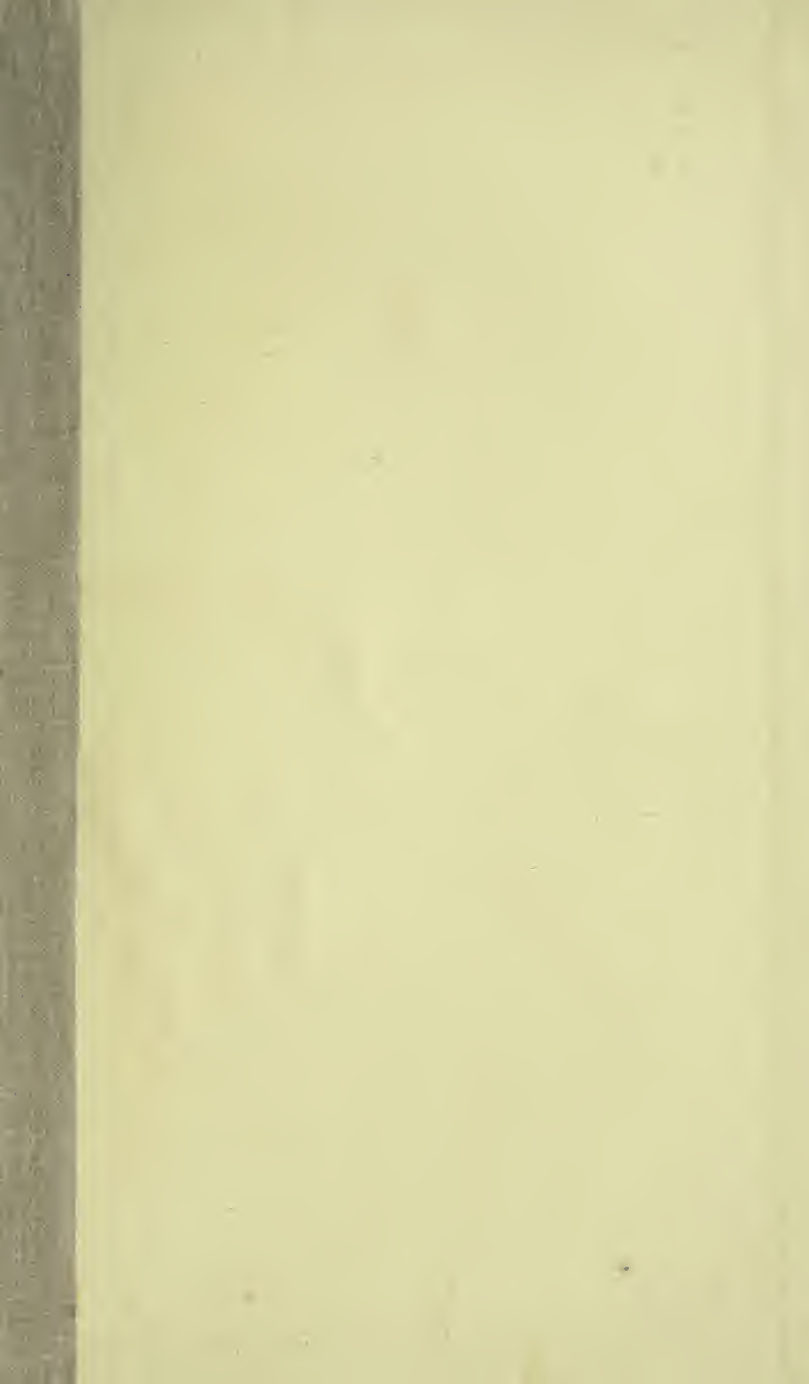












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